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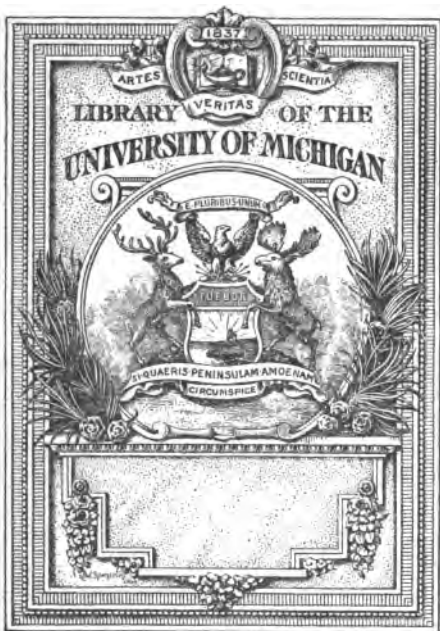
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# SABRINA WARHAM



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SABRINA WARHAM

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# SABRINA WARHAM

*THE STORY OF HER YOUTH*

BY

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

AUTHOR OF "BETHLEHEM," ETC., ETC.

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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**J. B. Cushman**

**in Co.**

TO ROBERT HOLDEN HOUSMAN

DEAR ROBERT, — The story which, in ways other than literary, you have helped me to write, now comes to roost at your door. I know that you will rate what I offer at more than its true value; but poor is the pride which can never welcome a lenient judgment, or be grateful for unreasonable lengths of credit generously accorded.

It is time, indeed, that the book should be tested by a judgment less darkly prejudiced than my own, for there comes a stage when writer's cramp enters the brain, making it blind as to results; and if an author cannot then choose to lay aside his work, and come back to it after years with eyes freshened by absence, he must let it go in the form it has reached at the stale end of his labours.

Every book that is written, if it holds life, becomes true to the writer before he has done, though it may show but a maimed form at the last. And at a very early stage this story came to have for me all the interest of an experience in real life, growing, as it were, out of the soil of its locality. There, as I walked and planned, fate flattered me,

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so that often invention was but the coming upon things already prepared. The landscape became sympathetic, everything grew, or stood rocky in its place, even the right faces moved briefly across the stage. So, if I mistake not, Sabrina and her lovers have all been before me in the flesh long enough to come true; and perhaps it is only through having to search back thirty years that I have found my story pass out of history into the realm of fiction.

Some day I hope you will visit the fields where I have gleaned, and see for yourself the Monastery Farm, East Gill Castle with its woods, and the broad downs where in very deadly earnest rabbits rattled their chains by twilight, and were for once released from a night of brute neglect. Only the other day I found, with a pang of bereavement, that Thomas Hardy had used a similar incident in one of his stories. That is the danger of raising fiction from fact: others have been over the ground before, and the lonely furrow has been turned often by stronger hands, and has yielded better harvests.

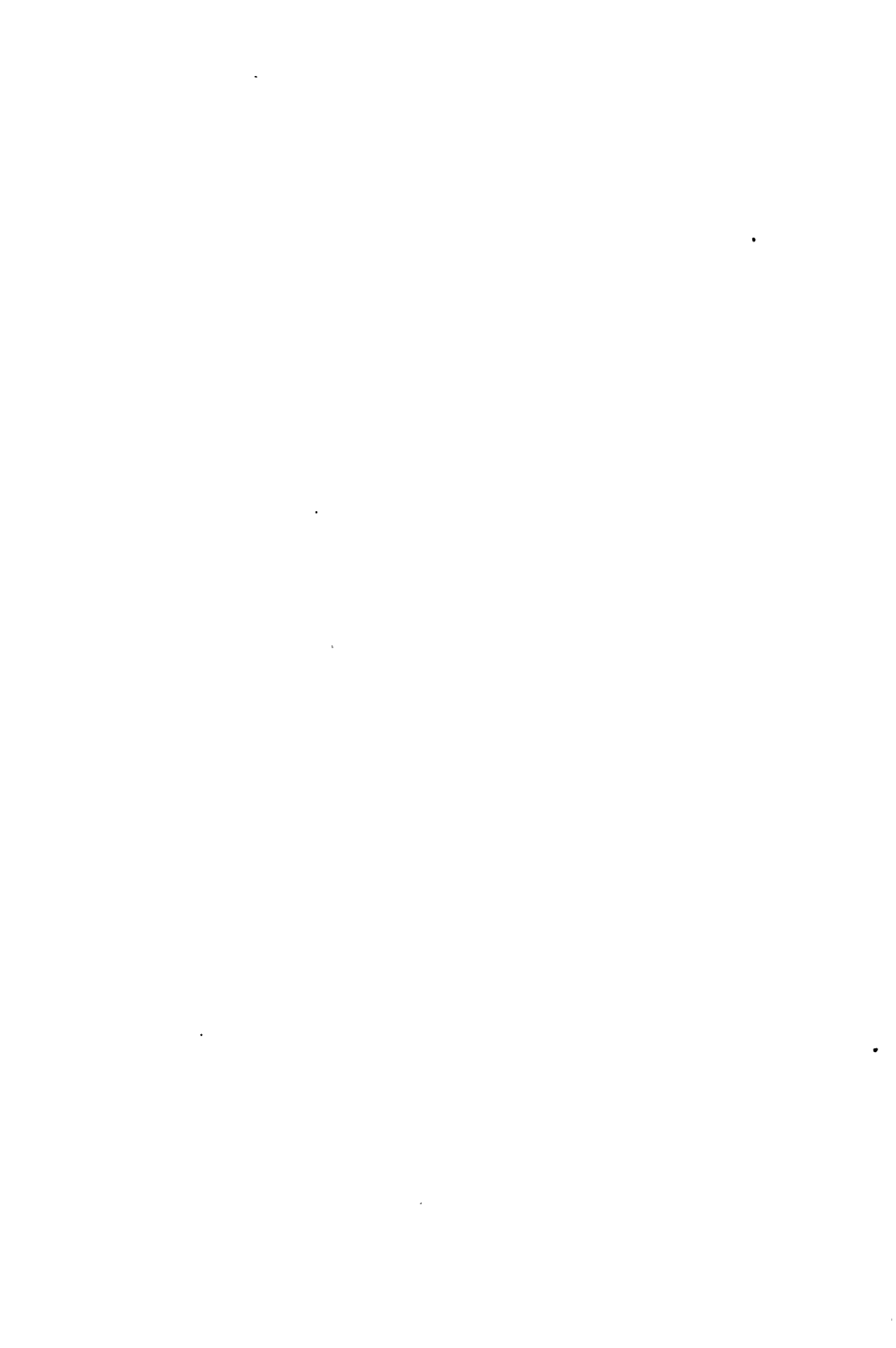
Yet my acknowledgment remains due less to them than to the "genius of place" which guided me to all I might otherwise have missed. Snail-delicacies are still to be had for the gathering on the slopes of the Roman Camp; far out to sea the light-ship swings on "the spool," which in rough weather small boats must avoid; and if you travel with the

local carrier, perhaps Tam George is the gossip who lightens the hours of your journey.

West Gill, alas! is no more: red villas have become the tombstones of its perished simplicity. But over East Gill a wise landowner's arm still extends; and beneath thatched roofs, where outsiders can find no lodging, it sleeps as it did a hundred years ago.

May its quiet unchangeableness last out the lives of those who have made it the home of my story, and found in it the contentment at which our modern world does not aim.

L. H.



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SABRINA WARHAM





# SABRINA WARHAM

## CHAPTER I

### ENVIRONMENT

Few who depend on the railroad for knowledge of our English coast will be familiar with the locality here told of. Excursionists may have stepped ashore for a few hours at West Gill, where a weekly steamer comes disturbing its quiet during the summer months; yachtsmen may have sought a night's shelter under the rugged cob which rounds to completeness its natural harbour, but few will have gone further than the small fishing-village pent between high downs, which here abruptly divide and give access to the sea. Only, maybe, from off shore, have they seen East Gill with its prim Georgian castle set like a brooch amid twin-breasting woods; or Amesbay, whose steep shingle frets soundingly behind the jagged rocks and archways of its ruined shore-line.

For many miles along that part of the coast the land has something akin in character to the rude practical energy of the race it has bred. In one long heave of down it puts shoulder to the plough, and gets sharply to work at the business of the field. Behind this broad barrier all is typical of slow rural life: and save for a touch of the fisherman in the garb of the field-labourer, a few trees with wried and weather-beaten heads

bowed permanently to the course of south-western gales or the occasional dropping inland of white sea-birds from over the downs, one might not guess the close proximity of an element which hardly fails in any year to mark its record in the local burial-grounds.

A visitor to these parts must turn a mile or so inland and look back from the higher ridges thus gained, before the general formation of the coast becomes apparent to the eye. Then the two extremities of a broad open bay may be seen: to the west Tort Point, thrusting its long neck far out from the mainland; to the east Herm's Head, blunt and high, round which, twice a day, scours the tide-race, known locally as "the spool," one of the fiercest currents which wear down our English coast.

From the bleak aspect of this inhospitable stretch of shore, dotted with the black and white of lonely coastguard stations, the eye falls pleasantly upon the richer colouring of the country as it rolls inland. Above West Gill rise fields bare and wide over the curve of broad downs, with no other feature to their surface than low, treeless hedgerows bleaked by the wind; but round about East Gill, two miles distant from its neighbour, woods begin to variegate the view. Along bossy knoll and pastoral hollow the broad sheltering covers ridge and dip between low mounds of arable country, and find their limit only in the great flats of bronze and purple heath, which stretch thence eastward to Warringford, a town resting slothfully on the neck of an estuary now grown trafficless through the diversion of trade.

Viewed in this direction, the landscape, with the decorous towers of East Gill Castle rising from the thickly wooded foreground, has something of Italian grace in its flowing contours and luxuriant tones. Landlocked waters of the distant estuary lie very blue in their dark setting of rusted heath;

high clusters of red-stemmed pine crown woods where chestnut and ilex share a place with native beech and oak; and, for a curious finish, the tall white chimney of a pottery on the outskirts of the town shows out above the low roofs surrounding it like some solitary campanile.

The resemblance comes perhaps but transiently with hour and season, dependent on sunshine or clear air. Scarcely could it have been said to hold under the grey heavens of an October afternoon which rendered more vivid the red beginnings of decay already marking the flanks of the Castle beechwood; nor did it lend warmth of colour to the thoughts of one solitary pedestrian traversing the long rise which, through a junction with the West Gill road, leads on to the Hone highway, and so to direct communication with the outer world. If face gave any indication of mood, pleasure in her surroundings formed no link between this woman and the fair prospect broadening beneath her. She moved forward with an eye that seemed to ignore all outward objects, her fair face betokening a mood of aimless yet settled despondency. This spirit appeared also to affect her pace: at times she would step out quickly, as though sloth of movement had brought weariness to a body framed for energy; then, as if recognizing the unreasonableness of haste, she would fall back into the loitering step she had just abandoned. Evidently she was employed in that least profitable of all occupations known in poor sporting phrase as the killing of time; and little success appeared to attend her efforts.

Presently, a short distance ahead, the silhouette of a large open vehicle protected by a canvas awning came into view: under this awning could be seen the heads of a group of passengers; in front rose a pile of luggage, amid which the driver sat invisible. Its course for the moment was along the high level of the road, which from that point

descended to the Hone valley, and the railway station four miles beyond. For an instant the ear might catch the distancing sound of voices and laughter; then, almost as suddenly as a descending parachute, the white-topped waggonette disappeared from view over the farther brow of the hill.

To the solitary woman following its track, the departure of this heavily laden vehicle had a significance. West Gill was now rid of its last handful of visitors; the season was over: thenceforth, for three full quarters, the place, empty of strangers, would fall back into that companionship of solitude which nature imposed: late autumn, winter, spring, and early summer, must all pass before West Gill meant anything again to the outside world.

Five minutes later, the pedestrian, reaching in turn the summit of the hill, could see, far down in the lane below, a travelling spot of bright colours making fast for Hone, now visible in the distance, a cluster of red roofs under a faint curtain of smoke. As her eye followed the brake's course her lips moved, making words audible: "There goes life!" she murmured in a tone of reverie. Her look seemed to add more eloquently than speech, "I am left behind."

The woman whose solitary thoughts thus found utterance had that distinction of form and feature which gives to youth a foreshadowing of age; girlhood could no longer define the charm of her personality. The gay buoyancy of life was here already veiled in a reserve which belongs as a rule only to matrons or the middle-aged: she seemed in her goings to be moved by thought rather than by the springs of health; yet one would judge from the warm glow of flesh which bore the delicately ingrained influences of sun and air, as well as from the ease and confidence of her gait, that health had come to her as much by practice as by birth-right. But the face showed a gravity, both of expression and feature, which the entire figure

seemed to reflect; the eyes were dark and regardful under low arched brows prone to knit as though in controversy with thought. The finely formed lips curved a little disdainfully, with a touch of satire easily changeable to bitterness when, as now, despondency was the dominant mood. Refinement and strength, intellect and feeling, seemed to be working together here in an ill-balanced relationship; while the firm and rather high carriage of the head gave an air of defiance to a face which many would have owned to possess both beauty and nobility, but which few would have called a happy one.

Some faces, even in youth, give indications of an inevitable portion of sadness due to fall upon their owners, as a debt owed to nature for the ominous lines in which their beauty has been cast. The woman's face now described was one of these. How far by her own fault, how far through circumstances beyond her control, she fulfilled those indications, the pages which follow are to show. Here, reader, is Sabrina Warham: and when you have heard all that may be said for her, as well as what must be urged against her, you may not think it amiss that some one has tried to put her story upon record.

## CHAPTER II

### RETROSPECT AND FORECAST

THAT constitutional fear of the future which arises from the sorrowful experiences of the past had taken an early hold upon Sabrina Warham's mind. Her father had been one of those men of brilliant attainment but faulty performance whose lot it seems to be to lay their mark more deeply upon womankind than upon the world at large. In his youth he had wrecked by deliberate folly and extravagance a University career, which at one time had pointed to distinction. Debarred from a life of scholarship, after some years spent in literary hack-work and the teaching of classics at Middle-class seminaries, he secured an appointment as librarian and private tutor to that branch of the Lutworth family which owns and occupies East Gill Castle and its domains. During his brief tenure of that office he succeeded in battering himself into a passion for a woman his senior in years, his inferior in station, a certain Martha Lorry, niece to the Castle bailiff and humble companion to the beautiful Miss Janet Lutworth, afterwards more widely known in society by her two married titles of Lady John Holning and Lady Berrers. To the lowly companion, whose beauty many accounted a fair match for that of her young mistress-friend, Scholar Warham lost such rags of a heart as he possessed; and with a certain generosity, at a moment when some breath of scandal had gone out against the blameless reputation

of the woman he loved, fell into the desperate expedient of a marriage, which his wife, at all events, had in after years sufficient reason to deplore.

It is little use for men with tarnished morals to take hot sides with the angels in this world's war against wrong: as often as not they only succeed in doing the Devil's work for him in quarters where he would not otherwise have secured a footing. Sabrina Warham's earliest memories were of a household divided against itself, not indeed by open recrimination and strife, but none the less by an incompatibility of tempers which reduced to desolation the comforts of home. She saw her mother, one capable of many complaints about small things, suffering without a word the ever-increasing neglect of the man whose life she had in the world's eyes to share. For several years after their marriage George Warham's restless disposition and infirmity of purpose caused a periodical break-up and shifting of the home, with the result that no single locality ever had for Sabrina those associations which count for so much in retrospect. At a later date any pretence that his wife's society was necessary for his happiness ceased to appear reasonable to a man in whom the petty economies and shabby gentility of domestic life roused nothing but disgust; leaving his wife and daughter to shape out their own existence in the mean surroundings of a London suburb, he adopted a roving life of lecturing and journalism, in which his wayward abilities found a better outlet than in the fixed routine of home life.

With eyes fully open to his faults, Sabrina had loved her father, and had found in his brief returns to domestic duty the only intellectual companionship of her youth. All her mental equipment seemed to have derived from him, her capacity, her tastes, and the acquired convictions which developed with growth; and when Mrs. Warham began to find in



the spiritual teachings of the Church of Rome a solace for the afflictions of her married life, there came about a further division of thought and interest between Sabrina and one to whom she felt all moral sympathy to be due.

Mrs. Warham's reception into the Roman Church was but one of many causes which decided Sabrina, at the age of seventeen, to strike out a line for herself holding in it some prospect of independence. Study and reading were her natural bent, and she trusted to find in teaching scope for her abilities as well as the means to be of service to her mother in a day which she began apprehensively to foresee. Away from his family George Warham led a life of which little good could be spoken; gradually the home ties slackened, news of him came more seldom; remittances, always tardy and irregular, at last became so intermittent and scanty that they could no longer be counted on. It seemed that Mrs. Warham, with health fast breaking, would soon be left entirely dependent on a small inherited annuity, enough to provide her with bare sustenance, but not to maintain a home for herself and Sabrina.

Circumstances had reached this pass when news of disgrace and impending disaster brought revelation of much that had only been guessed by the two women who loved him as to the life into which Mr. Warham had fallen. The daughter answered the call which the wife could not: she found her father a fugitive from justice, desperately hastening his own end by means which the law still allows to a man weary of existence. During the days that followed the young girl faced a scene of physical horror, and learned from the sick man's ravings things of the past no less terrible, which stamped indelibly upon her mind an unexplained sense of the wrong underlying the whole structure of modern society. In the face of all that she then dimly gathered of matters with regard to which the

law called for no account, more endurable seemed the discovery that her father, like the patriarchs of old, had been the husband of two wives. Scholar Warham accomplished his end before justice had traced him to his hiding-place. In a lucid interval when final dissolution was near, he looked fondly into his daughter's face, and spoke in the kindly manner of former years. "Well, lassie," he said, "it will please your mother that we've kept it out of the papers. I shan't be worth a paragraph when I'm dead." And he said it as though it were a good thought, comfortable to reflect on. Sabrina afterwards, when recounting to her mother all that was done and said in those last days, felt bound to communicate what had actually proved to be her father's last words. She repeated them with shame, and saw with surprise the widow's face change and grow tender. Gathering up her hands to her breast as though something worth holding lay there, "Ah, he thought of me at the last, then!" she said. "God rest his soul!"

These events had taken place nearly five years before the time at which our story opens. Mrs. Warham, at the crabbed invitation of her half-brother, James Lorry, farmer, went back to live in her native place, under the same roof which had sheltered her childhood. Sabrina followed the course which she had chosen, only gradually to realize that the love of learning did not imply also the love of teaching, or the power to make it effectual in submission to the dictates of others. Furthermore her lack of definite conviction on religious matters had made her position difficult as a teacher of the young among that class where orthodoxy remains the stamp of respectability; and it was for this very cause that she was now thrown out of employment, with small prospect of finding another post.

Weeks had stretched into months, till the time for the beginning of autumn terms had passed,

leaving her to the outlook of an unemployed winter, and of all the terrible weariness which inactivity and lonely environment would produce. Added to this, there now arose in her mind a dread, not to be stifled, that fate was grimly deciding for her a point of duty about which she had hitherto been in doubt. For several years she and her mother had been but little together; and as long as Mrs. Warham could travel, it had been her own choice that their brief meetings should take place away from the spot which had again become her home. The daughter did not find that the long separation had made an assimilation of ideas and interests more possible; but the habit of filial affection was strong in her, and the memory of the past had left on her mind a sense of indebtedness, and a wish to give compensation, that was almost an obsession on her conscience. The call for a return to domestic duty during the remainder of her mother's life would have been accepted by her the moment she recognized it; but she dreaded it more than she could say; and for that dread reproached herself no less acutely because she saw its reasonable side. She could not be rid of the fear that the effort would fail of its purpose. "If I could only be sure that she really wished for me!" was the conditional conclusion at which she always arrived; and the vital point remained unsettled.

It was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, when Sabrina, after watching the brake disappear, sat down to rest on a bank by the roadside. Casting aside the broad-brimmed and unadorned straw-hat which had hitherto shadowed her features, she drew out from her pocket a still unsealed letter, whose brevity hardly warranted the time she now gave in its perusal. As she read, holding the missive in one hand, she began with the other to make slow passes over her face, a movement which had evidently become a habit. With the tips of her fingers she traced lightly the

lower line of the cheek as far as the ear; thence following its outer curve upward, her fingers rested on the smooth tresses which flowed back from the temple, till, encountering a stray lock of short wavy growth, they drew it down into momentary conformity with the rest and slid back by the way they had come. This unconscious movement in perpetual repetition gave to her face as she read a singular air of abstraction and reverie, yet at the same time of doubtfulness. Much as the pendulum of a clock lends evidence by its mechanical motion of the more complicated workings within, so did these chafing fingers seem to indicate the inner workings of a mind not at rest.

Suddenly the hand's movement was checked. Putting the letter aside, she held her face for a moment between her two palms; then rose abruptly and walked on towards Hone at a resolute pace. Within the hour she had reached the post-office, which was also the chief shop of the village. There, purchasing a money order, she enclosed it in her letter, and having posted it, set out on her return journey with the relieved sense of something done which would yet leave her free before making decision final. Arrived at the outskirts of the village, a uniform sobering of light in the sky overhead and a deadness in its reflection upon the distant landscape reminded her how quickly the days were now shortening; it would be dusk before she could reach home. She was now at the foot of the long, winding descent down which about two hours before she had watched the covered wagonette making its way to Hone railway station. Hearing an approach of wheels, she looked back, and saw the same conveyance now returning empty.

Doubtful whether to avail herself of the opportunity which chance had thrown in her way, she stood still; a nearer view of the driver's crab-apple face, and the friendliness of his salute, decided her to claim the boon.

"Will you give me a lift?" she said. "I am going partly your way."

"To West Gill, miss?" inquired the man. "You be very welcome."

"I am for East Gill; it will do quite well if you put me down where the roads divide."

The driver got down to open the door of his waggonette. Sabrina, then remembering that her purse was nearly empty, asked what the fare would be.

"Oh, anything," said the man, eyeing the wind as one not stiff at a bargain. "It's all in the going; we've got to get back anyway."

As they started he threw a sociable look over his shoulder, to remark, "So happens I go a bit more your way to-day than ordinary; I've something to leave down at Falkner's lodge; that's how we manage when anything's wanted in a hurry over to East Gill; they sends up and fetches 'em." He added, as a matter of more real interest, that it had been a warm day for the time of year.

"This must often be a hot road for you in the summer," remarked Sabrina; "there is so little shade."

"Shade, you say?"

"No trees, I mean; down in East Gill we are much better off."

"Ah, so you belong to East Gill, do you, miss? You be come from the Castle, I'm thinking."

"No; the Monastery Farm is where I live."

"Never heard tell of that place," said the driver, searching his memory of the locality.

"Perhaps you know of it as Lorry's Farm," said the girl, in a half-shy embarrassment at having to explain; "but it is the Monastery Farm really."

"Ah," said the old man, accepting her explanation as a reassertion of his statement, "now you speaks what I can understand, miss. It's been Lorry's Farm a hundred years and more. I never heard it called Monastery Farm before."

"It was a monastery in old days; what is the big barn now was once a chapel, and part of the garden was its graveyard. They say monks have been buried there; but there is nothing to show it now except a stone cross which still stands in the centre of the wall."

"Oh yes; I recognize the place well enough as you tells it. That's Lorry's Farm, that is." He added, after a pause, "So you be staying at Lorry's Farm, be you, miss?"

"I am Farmer Lorry's niece."

"Oh, his niece? Yet surely you be a stranger in these parts?"

"I have not been here since I was quite a child; I can only just remember the place and recognize a few faces. You, I suppose, have lived here all your life?"

"So far as I can remember."

"You live at West Gill? I suppose it will be very empty now for a good while."

"Well, not empty, so to speak; but quiet, mortal quiet."

"Except for storms; you get those, don't you?"

"Storms? Lord, what don't we have! Why, last winter there was all the boats draw'd up along the road for a quarter of a mile and more, ten weeks on end; and even so I see'd some on 'em down toward the quay pitching over each other like boys playing leap-frog. Ah, there ain't much goes on then, neither sea nor land; why, this road was snowed up three weeks on end last winter; not a letter or a newspaper to be got through except a man rode over for 'em across country."

"It must be very dismal!" said Sabrina, feeling a mental chill at the prospect.

"Well, it ain't what you'd call a rollicking time what we gets then," agreed her informant; "but it's what we must expect."

The fact was enough for his simple philosophy; life indeed had provided him with no comparison

since the road between West Gill and Hone, with perhaps as much country as the eye could take in from its highest point, measured the full round of his universe. As it was the nature of winter roads to become impassable, of winter seas to storm, of freezing hurricanes to blow, so it was man's lot to accommodate himself to these visitations of the higher powers and to lead a sealed-up existence till their forces were beaten back into calm. Sabrina felt as though she had descended upon a region where for a portion of each year the inhabitants went down to live in tombs; and she wondered, studying the shrewd weather-beaten face, what chance vegetable or mineral entering into the human spirit could so steel or mould it as to make such a life endurable. Her own mood was autumnal indeed as she came once more within sight of the fast shredding woodlands round East Gill, now sombre under the uniform fall of a dusk that held no western gleams.

Wrapt in her own thoughts she paid small heed to her companion's talk; conversation grew slack as they neared the parting of the ways.

"It is here, then, that I get down," she said at last.

"No, no," answered the man. "I tell 'ee I'm going on to Falkner's lodge."

"But are you not doing it merely to oblige me? I don't see any parcels."

"Well, it's just a bottle of medicine for a body that lives away down your end."

"Some one who is ill?"

"Ay, been ill a long time, too. It's that Mrs. Gage who lives off the village, the last cottage toward the heath, Warringford way."

"Oh yes, I know the cottage well; why not let me take it?"

"No, now that would be troubling you too much, miss. If I leave it at the lodge it's safe to be fetched; being special, and immediate, they must know it's coming."

"But if I take it," persisted the girl, "they will get it all the quicker. Please, I would like to."

She refused to have it otherwise: dismounting where the roads branched, she took possession of the parcel, and bidding the man a kindly farewell, turned off along the East Gill lane. The small errand with which she had been thus quick to charge herself measured to her mind the sort of relief which she must now always be seeking to fill up the emptiness of her days. Yet she was even then advancing step by step to a meeting the consequences of which were to change before long the whole aspect and colour of her life; and the drug of the local chemist which she carried was to have in her hands a virtue as effectual for the mingling of fates as had any hate or love-potion in the days when credulity gave magic its power.

A quarter of an hour's walk brought her to the cottage; it was then already middle-dusk. In the doorway a young girl stood looking anxiously along the footpath which led from the village and thence to the open heath. Only when Sabrina stopped to deliver her charge did the other heed her approach. A half-shy smile, timid and winning, then lit up a fair and rather foolish face. The look brought sudden recollection to Sabrina.

"What, can this be Lottie?" she exclaimed, and reached out a friendly hand in greeting. "Why," she went on, "you were such a little thing when I last saw you; yet you have not changed much. And where have you been hiding yourself, that I have not seen you all this time?"

The girl explained that she was in service at the Castle, but had leave during her aunt's illness to pay her a daily visit. She thanked Sabrina gratefully for the trouble she had taken, but her manner showed flutter and agitation. The woman who attended on Mrs. Gage had not returned on time, and Lottie professed anxiety to get back to



the Castle, since the housekeeper's orders were strict for her to be in before dark.

Sabrina bade her go. "I can quite well stay," she said, "till some one comes;" and to the girl's protestations, "Oh no, don't thank me; remember we were once playmates. I ought to have found you out before. We shall meet again: waste no time now."

Lottie showed herself light of foot. Sabrina, left to find her own way in, entered and knocked lightly at the door of the inner room.

"Who is that?" asked the sick woman from her bed, in a complaining tone.

"I am Sabrina Warham," answered her visitor. "Perhaps you used to know me once, though I cannot remember you."

"What are you here for?" the other bluntly demanded.

"I have brought your medicine; the doctor has directed it for immediate delivery."

"Oh! Did he tell you to come?"

"I happened to be passing."

"Where's Lottie? Why didn't she go for it?"

"She was obliged to get back. I am here till some one else comes."

There was a pause, the woman making no further comment.

"Well, as you are here," she said fretfully, at length, "you might as well give me my medicine."

Sabrina measured and administered the dose. The invalid screwed up her eyes and clawed feebly for something that she missed.

"Why haven't you the sugar ready?" she cried.

The sugar was found for her. "Who did you say you were?" she inquired again when the bitter taste had been got rid of.

Sabrina repeated her name.

"Ah! I never liked you," was the sour rejoinder.

"There was no reason why you should," answered the girl, a little amused; "what was I to you, or you to me?"

"They used to send for Lottie to go down and play with you, always just when she was most wanted."

"That was years ago: was she so much wanted, then? She must have been quite a small thing."

"There was others smaller: she was old enough to mind the two little ones; but she always would be off playing."

Wishing to draw the poor woman from her grievance, "Where are the others now?" Sabrina asked, and was answered; "Where I shall be before long."

"Do you mean they are dead?"

"What else should I mean. Don't you see I'm dying?"

"I hope you are mistaken; that is, if you wish to live. Is your niece, then, the only one left?"

"There's the boy; but he never comes now: he stays with his father."

"Away from here?"

"Over at Wood End. Why do you pretend not to know anything? All the people about here know that I am a deserted woman. Isn't your mother the same? There was talk of it."

Sabrina flushed deeply. "Such talk, then," she said, "was untrue. My mother has been a widow for nearly five years."

"Ah, that's what she gives out!"

"It is merely the truth. I, at least, ought to know, for I was with my father when he died." To prevent further discussion of the subject, she asked if there was anything she might do while waiting.

"Is your bed easy? Will you let me shake up your pillows?"

"No," answered the woman, shortly, "I don't like strangers to touch me: I'll wait and let it be seen how they neglect me. Oh, I am left cruelly alone!

It's a dog's death I'm dying—hours and hours on my back and can't move a limb. That all come of the way my husband treated me. I'd have been dead before now if I'd lived with him much longer."

Sabrina felt a sensitive shrinking; she said gently, "I will come in any day, if you will let me. If I can be of use I need not always be a stranger."

"You'll do as you like about that," answered the sick woman; "the gentry always do. Times they come meddling so one's no peace from 'em; then they forget all about one. It's always the one thing or the other!"

"Well," said Sabrina, colouring slightly, "I am not 'gentry,' so you need not be afraid of me. If you want me, I can come in; if you don't want me, I can go away. What time is your niece generally with you?"

"Mostly towards evening; but they don't let me have her for more than an hour, and that not all days. Not that I need mind it so much, for it's little comfort to me she is. She was always gay and gadding in her ways; and when she's here she mostly stands looking out of door or window as if she couldn't abide having to stay. Ah, well," added the sick woman, after a pause, "I shan't live long enough to see *her* end, I suppose. I'm saved that!"

The neighbour whom Lottie had spoken of at this moment entered, and Sabrina, having no further reason to stay, rose, glad to escape; with a brief promise to come again she made her way out into the open air.

Twilight was now in its last shades toward nightfall, deepening over the tract of heath, which here lay within shadow of the long down. As Sabrina advanced by the field-path, which was now her shortest way home, the vast wall, uniform and smooth, of this sombre mound, immediately confronted her, lifting its barren outline against a

wannish sky. Toward its western declivity the monotony of the ridge was broken by three blunt toothlike cuttings, whose angles grew sharper and more defined as the oblique point of view became the direct. These indentations marked the ramparts of an ancient camp, once British, then Roman, now seeming almost geological in their significance, so pastorally welded had they become with the earth of their origin. Immediately below these mounds of once strategical importance lay the Monastery Farm, with low thatched outhouses and garden enclosed in a straggling girdle of trees. As Sabrina crossed the last field she saw the windows beginning to light up and blinds drawn. Over the opposite steep of down, moving fast, came a man's figure in a white coat, dropping directly toward the track which led from Amesbay to Warringford.

## CHAPTER III

### A DIVIDED HOUSEHOLD

SKIRTING the outbuildings, Sabrina made her way to the front, where the central door stood flanked by a low, broad façade of windows, irregular in size and setting. At the far end a wooden flight of steps, boarded windows, a horizontally divided door, and overhead a crane projecting from the eaves, gave evidence of the mixture of domestic and farm purposes for which the building was used. The house door stood open, showing a broad flagged passage which, passing from front to back, led out again to a flower-bordered lawn, from the enclosing wall of which rose the small stone cross marking the site of the old monk's cemetery.

Entering this passage, Sabrina ascended a small flight of stairs upon the left leading into a short corridor, at the farther end of which a similar stair descended to the kitchens and other living-rooms of the establishment. Between these two staircases lay the rooms which mother and daughter occupied attended by their own servant.

Opening the first door she came to, Sabrina entered the sitting-room. Though its window faced directly west, it was now deeply shrouded in gloom. Between the window and the fireplace could be discerned the outline of a still, seated figure with head slightly bowed.

No movement of welcome or recognition met Sabrina upon her entry, nor was any word spoken.

In the ensuing moments a faint click falling at regular intervals suggested some occupation in which quiet hands were mechanically engaged.

The girl threw off her hat, and sitting down, waited till a process with which she was familiar should be at an end. More than five minutes passed thus; then, having said the last bead of her rosary, Mrs. Warham raised her head and spoke.

"You have been out a long time, my dear."

"I went far."

"You should not have let it make you so late."

"On my way back I undertook an errand which detained me."

She told briefly the circumstances of her visit, ending with the remark, "Mrs. Gage is not an agreeable character, mother; so the penance was good for me."

Mrs. Warham smiled faintly, but made no direct answer. A few minutes later, on her daughter's proposal to light the lamp,—

"Do not light it for me," she said, "I am tired of sitting up; it may be best if I go to bed at once. Will you call Betty to me?"

Sabrina rose to give a helping hand, for the widow, in addition to other bodily ills, suffered from a weakness of vision which obliged her to wear a shade.

"No, no, my dear," she said, mildly rejecting the proffered aid, "I can see clearly enough; leave me to walk alone. You can come and say good night to me later."

Sabrina watched her mother pass through the communicating door to her bedroom; then, having summoned Betty, she lighted the lamp, and taking some volumes from a small tightly packed book-case, sat down to fill up with reading the four hours which had still to elapse before her own bedtime.

These few shelves of books formed her whole

library. A glance at their titles would have revealed to any casual observer that they were works of study rather than of relaxation; yet their owner found in them almost the only means of recreation that never failed.

An hour passed over a mind happily absent from its surroundings. Then Betty entered, bringing supper on a tray, and set it down at Sabrina's elbow. It was the signal to her of a routine to be gone through.

"Is my mother ready for me?" she asked.

"I dare say you may go in now," replied the other, in a tone of guarded concession.

Entering the adjoining room, Sabrina approached the bed where her mother lay.

"Can I do anything for you, mother?" she inquired gently.

"No, my dear; Betty has given me everything I want."

"You don't wish to be read to?"

"Betty has read to me."

Sabrina hesitated, and after an effort spoke: "Do you prefer her reading to mine?"

"My dear, I am accustomed to her: if you did it, when you went away I should miss you. One placed as I am should avoid making new ties; my dependence on the help of one need not make me a burden to others. There is also a reason which I need not name: you can read to me at other times."

Sabrina seemed about to answer. Checking herself, she said a little wistfully —

"In a few days I may have something to tell you — about my own plans, I mean. You are ready for sleep now, are you not?"

"Yes, I get my best sleep early; say good night, my dear, your supper is waiting for you."

Thus mildly ordered, the girl leaned down her face to be kissed; then turning, pressed her own lips to her mother's forehead.

It was one of Sabrina's leisurely sedate ways not to give and take a kiss simultaneously. Questioned by a friend as to her reason, "I am then sure," she replied, "of what I give, also of what I get," incurring thereby the charge of allowing a system of barter and exchange to be the guide of her affections. Yet the kiss she laid upon her mother's brow showed no lack of tenderness—a look dutiful and full of regret lingered upon her face as she turned away.

Returning to the sitting-room, she resumed her interrupted study, and as she read reached her hand now and again to the provisions upon the tray, contenting herself with the dry bread lying already cut beside her plate.

Betty presently, choosing her own time, entered and surveyed the finished repast with disapproval.

"Is there nothing I can cook to please ye?" she inquired gruffly.

"Nothing, dear Betty," answered Sabrina, her mind still fixed upon the page. Then, looking up with half-collected thoughts, "Oh yes! everything—I mean, everything."

"It looks like it!" said the woman, sourly. "Another day I won't let you have those crusts you go asking for; then you'll eat what I give you."

"Very well," assented the girl, still studiously bent, "that will do nicely."

Betty stood and glowered at the culprit, but Sabrina's head did not lift. After a few moments, finding herself ignored, the waiting-woman fuffed, and retired.

The banging of the door recalled Sabrina to her senses. "Oh, Betty dear," she cried, all in a hurry, "come and say good night; you know I didn't mean to be cross!"

But Betty's own meaning had already carried her beyond reach of her young mistress's tardy apology.



Left to herself Sabrina read on. Presently she became aware of singing; the sound of an unaccompanied voice travelled clearly up from below. Opening the door, she stepped out into the passage, and could then by hard listening distinguish something of the words.

“He left me for a damsel dark, damsel dark,”

was what first fell upon her ear with any meaning.

“Each Friday night . . . ”

gave the beginning of the second line; what followed was lost to her. In another moment the swelling notes rang clear, carrying the words along with them —

“And now he takes that damsel on his knee,  
And never, never thinks of me!”

The sentiments were evidently a woman's: a man's voice sang them. A tripping chorus, plaintive and gay, in which other voices joined, followed. Sabrina stood undecided, trying to complete her resolve.

Then the song ended; no other seemed to be following. She re-entered the sitting-room, shut the door, and sat down. But her mood had passed now from reading into reverie. “I wonder why I cannot be easy and natural like other people,” she murmured to herself. “Why cannot I do the things I wish to do? It always has to be by an effort of will—and then it doesn't succeed.” She knew that the singer must be David Lorry, her cousin, and that now in the big hall below-stairs the real life of the establishment was going on. Betty had told her of the old-world air of communism, with its underlying distinction of grades, which ruled during the evening hour upon Lorry's Farm; but while longing to come into touch with a custom that bore out her social theories, she was

aware of something in her blood which made the advance difficult. "I am my mother's daughter, I suppose," was the explanation she gave herself when, as now, the fit of introspection was on her, without thereby at all lessening her discontent.

Mrs. Warham, indeed, though a gentle and charitable-minded woman, had acquired, through the circumstances of her life, habits of thought and feeling which kept her stiffly aloof from all below her in the social scale. Between herself and the relative whose roof she shared there was little intercourse and no familiarity. The line of demarcation had been early established; and "Brother Lorry" and "Sister Warham" had, by persistence on her part, come to be the formal terms of their relationship. To others she spoke of him only as Mr. Lorry, and when in her hearing Sabrina referred to him as Uncle James, she dropped the advisory remark that toward one who was but a half-uncle, use of the surname would be more appropriate.

The farmer had given his widowed sister free house-room; and though he had been prompted thereto by family pride rather than by affection, its acceptance was in Sabrina's view a re-knitting of family ties which would otherwise have little concerned her. James Lorry had from the first been bitter over his sister's union with a man above herself in station; and when after years of trouble and final estrangement she had been left a widow almost without means, he had welcomed the event as a justification of his sarcasms. The house was larger than his needs required; since his wife's death, petty love of domestic rule had caused him to take in hand all the reins of household government, while the increasing disabilities of age withdrew him more and more from actual labour upon the farm. In that department young David Lorry was steward, dutifully carrying out the will of his father, and receiving for payment the prospect of

one day becoming owner of all. This adjustment of things suited old Lorry's temper to a nicety, and was accepted by the son with an indifference and a docile serenity which nothing seemed able to disturb.

Perhaps some notion of patronizing his sister in her downfallen gentility had led to the farmer's proposal of an arrangement that had now lasted for some years. But the widow had come, and by an obstinately retiring policy had evaded the patronage while accepting the relief.

"Brother Lorry," she said on entering his domain, "I am grateful to you for offering me a home; but I should not have come had I not known that the accommodation at your command made it possible for me to be here without interference on either side. I have been a lonely woman for many years, and it is my wish to remain so."

The farmer then for the first and only time spoke to her of her husband.

"You might have come here from the beginning," said he, "when your rascal first left you; but you wouldn't."

"When my husband was alive," the widow replied in state, "had I at that time allowed myself to be beholden to you, it might have been my duty to let you speak of him. Now that he is dead there is no longer any occasion." Brother Lorry, with a restive tongue ready to discharge the pent-up bitterness of years, was made to understand that certain conditions accompanied his sister's continued sojourn under his roof; it was not too late for him to say "Go," if the terms troubled him.

James Lorry, from that day and after that speech, had treated his sister Warham with an ironic ceremony and a snarling surface-civility, the import of which was entirely lost on her; but upon Sabrina it had made a painful impression at this her first visit to her mother under her uncle's roof.

Mrs. Warham was conscious only that she conferred gentility on her brother's domicile. Though during her matrimonial troubles she had been drawn to the Church of Rome, the vicar, ay, and the vicar's wife, had visited her upon her return to the neighbourhood. Brother Lorry might be a churchwarden, but no such thing as a card had ever been left on him or on his late wife. To the daughter in turn had this social recognition been tendered; she had not welcomed it.

"You must go and call at once, my dear!" said Mrs. Warham, when Sabrina showed relief at having missed her visitors; and there had been trouble at her leisurely fulfilment of the obligation.

"If I call," she complained, "they will expect me to teach in the Sunday school."

"It is a pity, my dear, that you should have any objection," was the pious mother's comment.

"Ah, that is the old question," said the girl, wearily. "You ought to be glad that I am so little attached to the heresy I was baptized in. As you wish me to go, I will — to call, I mean; but I should only be relieved if I found that they were out. It would be so much more convenient."

Sabrina had more feeling about the matter than she showed; from the beginning a vague sense that she stood in a false position weighed on her. It may be remembered that, in speaking to Mrs. Gage, she disclaimed being one of the gentry; yet in her intercourse with other members of the household of which she now formed a part, the imputation was constantly thrust at her. Until quite lately, believing herself to be merely a visitor, she had given small heed to the cause of her discomfort; but news recently received had told her that she was without employment, and the thought that her position in these uncongenial surroundings was threatening to become permanent, led, as she sat that evening over her books, to reflections full of despondency.

It was now after nine o'clock; once again the sound of singing below caught her ear. She rose on a sudden impulse, went quickly out, along the corridor, and descended the stairs. Here she found herself in a small dark lobby, with only a door now to pass. Laying her hand on the latch, she waited for the finish of the song; but when it came her courage failed. The short time afforded for reflection had become fatal to action; a dozen objections and scruples held her back; she was too shy to make the advance. Slowly and hesitatingly she withdrew her hand, and stole silently upstairs to her own solitude.

## CHAPTER IV

### LIKINGS AND DISLIKINGS

THE passing of a flock of sheep, with its accompanying jangle of sheep-bells, along the lane leading from Amesbay up to Lorry's Farm was to those within earshot as sure an indication of certain hours as, under the old monkish dispensation, had been the periodic ringing of the Angelus. At half-past seven each morning, and again between four and five in the afternoon, the flock was driven into change of pasture. A slowly moving cloud of dust rising above the hedgerows might, in dry weather, then be observed accompanying the meek rabble on its directed course like the cloud which followed the Israelites of old.

Their shepherd on these occasions was a young man of medium height, clad in a dark close-fitting jersey, which set well with the fineness of his build. Breeks of a nondescript hue, high leggings, and a skipper's cap completed a costume which expressed not so much the employ as the individual taste of its wearer. From these lendings of civilization there looked out a face of weather-stained youth: the profile had more of the Roman than of the Greek; the complexion was ruddy, like that of the David of Scripture; but though some touch of a southern race lay stamped on the sharp-cut features, the reserved bearing, the half-apatetic manner in which this youth carried the burden of his strength, were essentially English and yeoman. Too fit in limb, too much of an athlete to appear ungainly, he

yet lacked that grace of movement which belongs so naturally to the races of the sun. He was, indeed, in curious congruity with the surrounding landscape, one half of it rugged and stern, one half mild and responsive to the hand of man; in its essential characteristics northern, but bearing Roman remains. So also when viewed in relation to his flock he seemed at once a part of it yet aloof; like an eastern shepherd he went before, leaving his dog to follow at the rear; yet without casting a glance behind he appeared to have the faculty of knowing what went on, giving new directions in a voice scarcely raised, now only by gesture.

While he thus fulfilled the duties of his calling his face wore an air less of absent-mindedness than of a narrow absorption in the present: his thoughts seemed always directed to the attainment of a moving point on the road twenty yards ahead of him, never actually reached. It was in fact the reverie of the practical man, grave by nature, intent on, but not to be disturbed by, the business in hand.

On the morning following the events recorded in our last chapter, the shepherd, having led his flock to pasture, stood holding back the gate for the incoming herd, when he perceived one not as a rule so early a riser crossing the field toward him.

"Good morning, David!" she called in friendly tones, and drew aside not to hinder the entry of the sheep.

The shepherd touched his cap, saying, —

"Good morning, Miss Sabrina."

She took him up quickly. "David, why will you not call me 'Sabra' or 'Cousin' as I have asked you to? Why do you go on calling me 'Miss'?"

"The word just came," replied the other; "came natural like."

"But it is not to!" she insisted.

"Well, it shan't, then; not when I think of it."

"Think of it more often, please. Do you know, you make me feel a stranger."

David's face wore a look of calculation; he was counting his flock.

"I'd not have 'e feel that," he answered after a while; "not if the other way pleases 'e better."

"Of course it pleases me; why should you doubt it? What have I done to make you think such a thing?"

"I didn't think it; 'twas simply I didn't know."

"Well, then, you do know now; and especially that I want you to call me 'Sabra,' or 'Cousin Sabra'; never 'Miss,' unless you wish to offend me."

David's eye, meeting the challenge of hers, smiled and resumed its gravity.

"Cousin Sabra, then," he responded; "p'raps if I say it a bit it'll come easier."

"Is it so difficult?"

"Not if I don't look at 'e, Cousin Sabra; when I do I'm fairly put off."

"Why?"

"Because somehow it don't seem natural. You're not like any of us; 'twasn't likely: you've been brought up different, and you've lived different. Coming here you couldn't help being a bit of a stranger — not well."

All the while as he spoke he kept his eye fixed on the backs of the entering herd. "Eighty-seven," he counted aloud as the last one passed in. Picking up some farm-implements which lay near, he shouldered the gate and swung it to.

"Will you be kind enough to slip on the hasp while I lift it?" he said, suiting the action to the word. "This gate is always a bit awk'ard."

Sabrina complied.

"Well, there's a beginning of cousinly relations," he observed, smiling. "Ye can't say I treated 'e like a stranger that time."



"But you needn't have said 'Will you be kind enough?'" objected his cousin. "I *am* kind enough, and you ought to know it."

The young man pushed up his cap, and gave a rub to his forelock.

"It'll take a lot of thinking out, this will," he remarked.

Sabrina glanced ahead to the point, now near, at which they would be parting; in another moment the opportunity for sealing a friendly compact would be over. Gathering courage she said, a little breathlessly, —

"David, will you some day, when it is quite convenient to you, when you are going, perhaps, on your own account, drive me into Warringford?"

The thing was actually spoken; she was surprised at her own daring.

"In the cart?" he inquired.

"In whatever is convenient."

David Lorry was ordinarily a man of short speech, and he had explained himself more in the last five minutes than he usually did in a day. Now he relapsed into monosyllables.

"Ay," he answered, with a drawled intonation, expressive neither of pleasure nor reluctance, but merely of assent.

Sabrina found his manner discouraging: she wished she had not spoken, and was ready, if she heard no more, to abandon her project. She was agreeably surprised therefore at receiving a message from him the next morning: he was going over to Warringford that afternoon, and she was welcome, if she liked, to accompany him.

Before the hour arrived, however, the complexion of the day changed; a grey veil of rain descended upon the downs, robbing of all pleasure the prospect of a long drive over exposed country in the teeth of a chill east wind.

Mrs. Warham, who had remained mute on receiving the news of Sabrina's intended expedition,

hearing upon the window the press of rain, looked out at the steady downpour to remark, with a satisfaction her daughter could not fail to note, —

“That settles it, then.”

“I think,” said Sabrina, “that I shall go all the same.”

“Indeed, I trust you will do no such thing!” her mother protested.

“Why should I not? It won’t harm me.”

Mrs. Warham stated her own view of the case decidedly.

“Tearing off with your cousin in weather like this just to do a few shoppings,” said she, “is hardly modest; certainly it is not becoming!”

Sabrina’s colour burned; but she could not look at her mother and be angry. Her momentary resentment was changed to distress that such a view could be possible.

“Do you really mean that?” she asked.

“I mean it, my dear.”

“Then, of course,” said the girl, struggling with a rebellious will, “I won’t go.” She added as a proviso, “Unless it clears: then I must.”

Mrs. Warham showed a sense that Providence was on her side.

“It is not in the least likely to,” she remarked; and the event sufficiently proved her word.

Sabrina, too honest to excuse herself on the score of the weather, sent word to her cousin that she could not go, and saw him at the appointed hour setting forth alone. Before another had elapsed, disappointment changed to chagrin; the rain drew off its blinds from the downs, its long streamers frayed into air, the formless grey of the heavens became shaped into hurrying piles of cloud, and actual sunlight shot out over the landscape. A burnished haze lay over wood and down, folding the world in a shimmering sheath of gold.

The sudden brightness without awoke into song a canary whose cage hung high in the window, and

whose mission in life was to make a cheerful noise to the widow in her solitude. The sitting-room in which so many of Sabrina's hours were now entombed contained two articles of absolute discomfort to her soul; and from the exaggerated store set upon them by their owner they had acquired a sort of symbolic significance representing in outward and visible form the malady of environment that afflicted her: in a word, they got upon her nerves. Of these the canary was one: the other was a set of antimacassars. These parasites of gentility were to the person who reclined against them adhesive as burrs; from the chair-backs they were meant to protect they slid like water from a duck's back. When she leaned against one, Sabrina could feel through her dress the stamp of its network pattern; when she rose it sprawled after her and clung. Mrs. Warham's retirement to her own chamber was, each night, the signal for a clean sweep of these embodiments of the Victorian age.

But if these stood to Sabrina Warham's mind for all that was imbecile in domestic taste, the canary stood for sheer lunacy. While the perpetual click of its claws was a fretting discomfort, its note was a dinning of the brain. The sound of human speech was the target for its powers: at a monosyllable it chirruped; at a sentence it chattered; conversation was a challenge, and brought it trilling to the charge. To reading aloud it opposed a veritable torrent of sound; and in order to give her "Buddhie" encouragement the widow took pleasure in being read to. As an accompanist to his minstrelsy Sabrina was occasionally of use; but for more serious reading requiring attention, when Buddhie had no longer to be entertained, Betty's ministrations were preferred.

To keep her torment in health and happiness Sabrina cleaned his cage daily, gave him his bath, his seed, his drinking water, and the sand for his

abominable little feet to scratch on. Shakespeare's inquiry by the mouth of Shylock, whether any man feels hate toward the thing he would not kill, she would have met in the affirmative; for while she took pains to preserve to Buddhie his small miserable existence, she certainly disliked every sound of life that came from him.

Because the heavens were dull, because while his mistress lay in the retirement of her own room Sabrina had not spoken to him, Buddhie had sat or hopped mute during most of the afternoon. The first gleam of sunlight took the stopper out of him; with a metallic gabble of notes, like the first flourish of a piano-tuner, he broke into full song.

For a while Sabrina endured him till his frenzy got beyond bounds. The door into Mrs. Warham's room stood ajar; she might possibly be sleeping: Sabrina rose softly, and taking up two of her aversions from the backs of the nearest chairs threw them over her other aversion in his cage.

Peace followed: but the relief was not destined to last. In the silence that ensued a plaintive voice called from the adjoining chamber—

“What is the matter with my Buddhie-boy?”

Sabrina took down the antimacassars, and shed them once more into their places; “Buddhie-boy” was master of the situation. He sang uninterruptedly till dusk. As Sabrina stood at the window and watched the sun's last rays fail from the crest of the down, rendering back earth to the gloom of night, she saw again the light-clad figure of a man coming at a fast pace along the slope that descended upon Amesbay toward Warringford.

An unidentified form moving solitary over a bare pathless expanse evokes in certain minds an interest not accorded to one who travels by the beaten track. Sabrina, as she watched the pale figure descending the hill, wondered whether the pedestrian followed by chance or habit a line of

country so little traversed by other men. Then her thoughts reverted to Mrs. Gage, in returning from whose cottage she had first taken note of the stranger; and she felt remiss at not having rounded off a disagreeable day by paying a visit to that disagreeable person.

## CHAPTER V

### AT THE CASTLE ARMS

THE Castle Arms, the one inn of the neighbourhood, stood, or rather lay, for its low walls and broad thatched roof suggested more of a recumbent than a standing attitude, immediately on the boundary of the Castle park. The boughs of the great elms bordering the Lutworth domain here seemed, as they hung across the road, to be extending their patronage to the small hostelry. Some of the lower branches, indeed, had reach enough, when the wind swayed them, to deliver admonitory taps to the roof and windows as though reminding those within of certain rules and regulations which had here strictly to be observed; and, as a matter of fact, the inn, though free as regards the brewing trade, was essentially a tied house, and the knot was a fast one. To all who entered its walls, whether for business or relaxation, the word of Squire Lutworth was law; and the law of that worthy county magnate had a way of making itself felt.

The only man of the neighbourhood who withstood his authority was Farmer Lorry; and in consequence the social life of the community was divided. Labourers in the farmer's employ might drop in occasionally and take a glass during the day; but for one of them to enter when the day's work was over and the true hour of the village gossips had begun, was a sure sign that terms between master and man had run out, and that

approaching quittance had brought independence. Men at Lorry's got their evening beer free, but the benefit contained a condition; they were not to go where the Squire's closing-hours held force. The sound of the big Castle bell could be heard down at the farm, but its jurisdiction was there flouted. Farmer Lorry had a bell of his own, and used it.

Here, in fact, was a parish with two heads holding to contrary ways, — a case of "pull, devil; pull, baker"; hence the rival claims of the two houses formed the general topic of conversation when gossips met at the inn. Did Squire and farmer pass each other on the road, or exchange words across their boundaries, 'twas a reckoned or a disputed score for one or the other. Farmer Lorry had maintained a right of way which the Squire was for closing; the other had retaliated by sending trespassers on to Lorry's acres; the Squire's colours had carried the election against the Whig candidate, whom Lorry, a Tory of Tories, had been driven out of sheer contrariness to back. Lorry had held his own as people's warden against the Lutworth nominee; also he had his pew, out of which powers could not oust him. These were incidents of the past, forming an historic background for daily skirmishes. In the scapegrace doings of certain members of the two families there were also comparisons to be made: stories that never grew old.

The inn parlour, where the muse of local history held session, was a long low chamber, hung with coloured prints representing the accession, coronation, and marriage of Queen Victoria; in the place of honour over the chimney-piece was a large mezzotint of Napoleon Buonaparte lying in state, with the Duke of Wellington standing by in a deferential attitude. This work, intended to symbolize England's generous recognition of fallen greatness, gave queer notions of actual events to some of its local admirers; but it supplied in the

main an accurate summary of twenty glorious years in English history, and accounted for England being the island which it was, and had always to be. It helped, in fact, to mark time in a constituency retrospective in its politics. So, in times later than those we are now recording, has a picture of our late Queen mourning over the tomb of Benjamin Disraeli helped to win loyal votes to the honour of his memory.

During the daytime there hung about this chamber a smell evenly compounded of stale beer, stale tobacco, and stale corduroys. This peculiar fragrance, inseparable from its social uses, lay as it were in a becalmed state over the walls and furniture while daylight lasted. Toward six o'clock each evening it freshened and blew to a gale; the smell of fresh beer, fresh tobacco, and fresh corduroys then began to overpower the fumes of yesterday. In this renewal of the elements the corduroys were during the first hour the most active in casting their ozone to the atmosphere, in the second hour beer predominated, in the third hour smoke. It was not until the third hour, when with the late comers the united intellects of the village were assembled, that any really important topic was broached. The signal for the larger discussion was the arrival of Tam George, the carrier from Warringford, whose daily jaunts made him the collector of all the gossip that straggled through a sparsely inhabited district.

The three hours' rain of the afternoon of David Lorry's lonely drive into Warringford had its aftermath in the steaming of the corduroys seated that night in the Castle inn parlour; beeriness had but just gained its ascendancy when, at eight o'clock, the carrier entered, and, taking his accustomed place, called for a pint of bitter. All waited while he took his first draught, the draught of a thirsty man, whose whole mind must be given to the matter in hand.



"Hast heard," said Tam George then, addressing the company in general, with his own idiomatic use of the second person singular, "hast heard as how Squire is to be down o' Sunday, and Farmer Lorry, bedded with rheumatics though he be, do mean to drive up to church for the occasion, and sit before him and all the grand company?"

"What? Will he come along of Widow Warham?" inquired Sam Carter, whose name tallied with his trade. "Sure, he's never done that before."

"Maybe not," replied Tam; "but with her or without, 'tis plain he means to come; else why have Will Hedges been set to clean up the old pony-shay?—have made it almost like new, so he tell me."

There was a general recognition that for Will Hedges to be thus employed proved matters to be stirring.

"For we do know," continued Tam, accepting their assent to the reasonableness of his proposition, "that Farmer Lorry 'ud never 'a had the shay smartened up in her honour. When the widow first come, he let it be known to all he didn't approve of no Papish church-goings from his door; and when she was for borrowing or hiring 'twas take it or leave it, for all he cared, and no more than a wipe round to clean off the cobwebs come on it since the old missis died."

"Very true," remarked John Riddle, a long man, whose head seemed to have been shaped with the sole object of carrying out to the last extreme the excessive length of the rest of his person, and known accordingly to his associates as Long John. "Sure, and very true it is; for I've often wondered how 'twas he allowed that there shay to come up to the Castle looking so ramshackle and forsaken like, and Mrs. Warham a real lady as you might say. No, 't could never be for her he's had it all done to rights. Did he say anything to Will to show what his intentions might be?"

"Nay!" answered Tam George. "Master David he just come down and said to Will, 'Will, you put the shay to rights, and be sharp about it?' says he. And Will Hedges, having summat else to see to, he says, 'By when?' and Master David says to him, 'By Sunday,' and walks away; but he come back afterwards to see he give it a thorough doing-to, inside and out, — no end of a polish."

"Ah well, then, if David said it, it come from his father right enough," observed Long John. "It's wonderful, now, what a settled character he have become, decent and law-abiding, so to speak, since his flight into foreign parts."

"Yes, David be as sober as a married man, now," declared one afflicted in that cause.

"As some married men," put in James Aubrey, the village farrier. "We've known others; eh, neighbours?"

"Ah, that's true," remarked Tam George, gazing intently into the mug he held up to his lips, as though untold things lay at the bottom of it.

"'Tis so, indeed!" observed Long John, with a face of melancholy retrospect; "we married men have our temptations like other folk; on'y we be less showy with 'em than they young bachelors. Eh, what do *you* say, Martin?"

He addressed a meek-looking youth, who took his ale in a half-pint measure, as though thereby to disclaim equality with men of more seasoned capacity. The thrust apparently went home; a laugh arose, and the meek youth blushed. Tam George emerged from contemplation of his mug to remark —

"Talking of married men reminds me of that little trouble our late constable had, Officer Dawson I mean, the last time any one of this neighbourhood was took up for drunk and incapable. That was before most of you young chaps remember, I dare say?"

"Yes, Mr. George, you tell it us," replied one of the youthful members thus addressed, who had all heard the story before.

"Well," continued Tam, "you see 'twas this way: there'd always been a difficulty about taking up drunks from these parts, because by the time they reached Warringford they was generally sober, and the constable had to answer for it that they was reasonably convicted of drink before they started. Most of our constables saw from the start that the game wasn't worth handling, but Mr. Dawson, when he first come, being new broom to the job, was all for getting the place a bad name up at head-quarters so as to recommend himself to his superiors; which to my mind wasn't a neighbourly way o' doing things."

"Nor it wasn't, Mr. George," assented his hearers, thus indirectly appealed to at a known point in the narrative.

"Well, it so happened his wife was a jealous woman, and suspected him of unlawful eyes on another; and one day George Gage, who'd been over at Hone cattle market, come back frisky as a young bullock, bellowing down the village after dark, but not doing no harm to no one. Howsomever Mr. Dawson extends his authority over him, and takes him down to Warringford lock-up; and George Gage being a joyful, uproarious chap in those days, not having been so long married, it took the best part of three hours to get him there; so Mr. Dawson, thinking he'd sweated it sufficient for one day, stays the night—at least that's *his* story. His wife, having particular parties in her eye, thinks different. I don't say as I believe myself there was any harm, but the long and the short of it is, that was the last time any case o' drunk went over to be dealt with at Warringford. George Gage, poor fellow, was the on'y man in these parts who ever got drunk o' purpose, and Mrs. Dawson wouldn't have him touched."

The end of the story was a signal for the replenishing of mugs. After a first draught of the new measure, with a well-moistened voice Long John remarked,—

“George Gage, now, he be the curious’ sort I ever come across, though I’m not for saying he’s a bad man, but he have his uncleanness, so he have, that I know.”

“Ah? and how do ’ee make that out, John?” inquired Giles, the quiet man of the company.

“I make it out this way,” returned Long John. “T’other day when I was carting manure up by Wood End, George Gage come along and watch me at work. ‘Ah,’ says he, ‘I reckon donkey litter beats everything.’ Well, that was natural enough, seeing he keeps a donkey of his own, so I said nothing agen it. Presently, when I was goin’ to have my lunch, he says to me, ‘What ’a ye got there?’ So I told ’n—bacon. Then he says to me, ‘I’ve got something over at home better than bacon,’ says he. ‘What be that?’ says I; and he says, ‘Come and try a bit.’ Well, I’ve knowed George Gage to have pheasant before now, so without asking questions I said I’d come. We went in, and he took off a pot and he give me something to eat; and I ate, and I couldn’t say what it was. I chawed it over front and back, and I swallowed it down, and there’s no doubt I made the mistake of thinking it was good. Well, when I’d done, and was going back to my work, George he says to me, ‘D’ye know what ye’ve eaten?’ ‘I do not,’ says I. ‘D’ye think it good?’ Well, I owned I did; and then I says to him, ‘What is it?’”

Long John paused, and looked meditatively toward his pint mug preparatory to a second draught. A waiting silence assured him that he had the ear of the company.

“Then George he says to me, ‘Hedge’og!’” The narrator looked round upon his hearers to

watch the effect of his words. He added with relish, as of a thing creditably done, "I managed to bring it all back again, neighbours."

"And well you did, and well you did!" exclaimed Tam George, approvingly; "but 'twas a wasteful experience, man."

"Why, that reminds me," said Mr. Dufty, the sexton, a small, important-looking individual, who had come in just as Long John was starting on his narrative, "that reminds me of what took place between me and her ladyship last June, up at the tea-giving, on the virtue of delicate digestions, which she told me was the matter in my case. You know how her ladyship do always the grand neighbourly thing by we plain folk; so, knowing as how she'd be thinking to speak to me, I'd been posting myself up in the proper usage of all her titles. 'Lady Berrers, Lady John, my lady, my ladyship.' I'd gone over and over 'em all as I walked up the park till I could do the changes almost without thinking. So when I come up to the tables where her ladyship was standing, and she says to me, 'Good afternoon, Mr. Dufty,' I'd got my first word in nicely. Then she asks me if I'll have some tea. Well, as I never do take tea I'd forgotten I should be asked the question, but my courage didn't forsake me. 'No, I thank you, my ladyship,' says I, speaking quite natural; and then, thinking that to give no reason was slighting to her 'ospitality, I let her have the polite of it, 'If I drinks tea, my lady,' says I, 'I gets sour belchings, not unaccompanied by windy spasms.' Oh, at that her ladyship, her laughed most affable, quite as if we was on easy nodding terms, and she says to me, 'See, Mr. Dufty, what comes of having a delicate digestion!' Yes, and she was so pleased with me I thought she would never have done laughing. Surely, neighbours, it's a great condescension for one like her ladyship to tell me my digestion was delicate, and it's been on my

conscience according ever since. Ah yes, I call it grand neighbourly."

All seemed to agree with this testimonial to the lady in question. The sexton was then appealed to as one likely to know in what strength the Castle party would be coming to church on the following Sunday. He counted the Squire and Lady Berrers for certain; Master Ronald could be there, no doubt, if he chose; the house-party would in any case be small. Miss Margaret Holning, Lady Berrers' daughter by her first marriage, was reported to be still abroad for reasons of health.

"Lor' now, she be a poorly one," remarked one of the company; "yet she didn't used to look so when she first come. It must be three years now that we've seed nothing of her in these parts."

"Ay, it's all that," said Tam George; "'twas the very same year as David Lorry returned from his wanderings. She went away that summer, and he come back the same autumn. After that we heard she'd got to live abroad for her health's sake."

"Well, it's to be hoped she may pull through," observed Long John, in a tone of settled conviction to the contrary, "but they're a fast-dying family when the fancy takes 'em, all but the old Squire, that is. Ah, I'm afeared there be too much of her uncle Ronald in Miss Margery for her to last proper; her always had the same scampering way o' going about, like Master Ronald does now. His father was the same sort always."

"Ay," said Tam George, to whom by long prescriptive right the story belonged. "He was a hasty man, he was, and sudden in his actions; else he might have been with us to-day." Tam paused and drew on the anticipatory sadness of his audience for inspiration. "'Twas, I remember," he went on, "the very day after Scholar Warham took to him his bride. That next morning Mr. Ronald was at his shaving, but ne'er a razor could he find

as 'ud cut; strop how as he would—that's how it was explained afterwards—'twas all wooden edge, so's you may say; he might as well ha' been shaving with the strop for all he could make of it. Well, being a hasty man he loses his temper, and 'Be danged to 'e,' says he, 'but 'e shall cut.' And being so much a man of his word, no sooner said, he was bleeding just as handsome as a stuck pig."

"Did he kill himself, Mr. George?" breathlessly inquired the meek youth, who had known all the circumstances from his childhood.

"Not just then, he didn't," explained Tam; "but an hour after his man come in and found 'un lying in his senses just, but too weak to lift up a finger. 'James,' says he to him, 'James, I've been and made a mess of it!' And afterwards, when he was brought back to recovery, which wasn't for a good long while, he give the true tale of how it all come about, just as I've give it you: I ha'n't changed a word of it."

"'Twas a perilous near shave for him!" said Sam Carter. "I wonder he ever recovered."

"Ay, it was indeed, Sam," returned the other. "Afterwards he went right away, and we never saw or heard of him again till the Squire put up a tablet in the church to say he had died away in foreign parts; and then Master Ronald come. He was already in knickers then; and, believe me, 'twas the first news we got that his father had ever been married."

"Yes," put in the sexton, "to a foreign wife, I believe. 'Twas a rummy go, take it all round."

"Ah! but that's been always the way with they Lutworths," replied Tam George. "Quick courting, quick marrying, here one day, and gone the next; they was always a bobbety crew where matrimony was concerned; ay, and sometimes too where matrimony wasn't in the bargain."

"Well, yes," assented Long John, in extenuating

tone, "they've been always a bit flighty in such matters, and it belongs to their station to be so."

"Now, that's a true thing said," remarked Tam George, "and you might see its truth from its contrary in the case of all the Lorrays as we've knowed 'em. Now, as a family, they be late marrying; Mrs. Warham, Miss Lorry as she was then, she were nigh forty before she saw her way to the business; and no one could make out why she left a position like hers, and the safety of a pension for the rag-tagging of matrimony with a man so much younger than she was. Then Farmer Lorry, through his father living on so long, and being so close and jealous, was forty-five before he married. And it seems as if it 'ud be the same way with David now: if he have an eye for any maid he don't show it. He be a mortal quiet man so far as women be concerned."

"Ay, and it wasn't so as he always promised," observed Long John. "Gallous! he was that gallous once there was no holding him."

"Yet he was always a handy lad," declared the farrier, "and had a knowing way with horses from the first, hadn't he, Sam?"

Sam agreed that it was so.

"Ah, I know'd Sam 'ud remember," said the farrier. "You see, it come about this way: Sam, being a bit new to the business then, was carting timbers for the new houses that were being built up by Falkner's Lodge; and he'd got a load of long planks a'most touching the ground one end, and right out over the horse's head at the other. Well, he got on all right till he come to a bit of new road-mending where the cart went humpity. The horse had hardly gone a yard on it when 'bang' come a crack of one of they long planks right on his head; and before he knowed what that was for, 'bang' come another a bit harder than the first. The horse began rearing and kicking; Sam had a rare job to quiet 'un. Then he tried to go on again,



but it wouldn't do; no sooner were they started on the rough when bang come the plank on the horse's head, scaring the poor beast out of his wits; then he tried for to shift the planks, but that wouldn't do either; any bit back brought 'em too much out behind. Sam were kep' there half an hour or more wondering how to get the job through. So happens then little David Lorry come along and see what was up; and he says to Sam — Sam don't say it to him, not having enough sense for it, had you, Sam? — 'Give me a leg up,' says he. So Sam mounts him — he wa'n't no weight then — and he just sits straddle, and takes the bottom plank in his hands, and holds it so as it can't come no further. When they'd got over the rough bit he come down again; and all his fingers was pummelled black and blue by the joggling of they planks, but he hadn't made no noise. After that he used to hang round wi' Sam a good lot, and come down to the forge with the horses — anything to be with horses, or away from his father. But in the end the sea was the only safe place for him. Ah, poor lad! he come back very sober from it all."

The talk was at this point interrupted by the arrival of a stranger, who, after general greeting to the company, inquired of the innkeeper if he could have a bed for the night. Such a request in so quiet a neighbourhood caused interest and surmise to every mind in the room; with slow, curious scrutiny each man present began to form his own estimate of the new-comer's quality, and to speculate as to what business had brought him among them.

The man who formed the centre of this silent inquest gave by his appearance little indication of his place in the social scale. He was young, slender, and of good stature; his small head was set well upon shoulders broad enough to suggest activity, if not strength; he bore himself, moreover, with an

easy assurance, seeming never at a loss for that rightness of attitude which some find so difficult a thing to acquire. His hands were well shaped, but scarred and roughened by labour; his clothes, frayed and soiled, were of a light over-all description, their whiteness dulled by the stains of long service. The stranger combined, in fact, the bearing of a gentleman with the dress and general condition of an artisan. His face, when he uncovered, showed more than a pretension to good looks: the eyes were keen, and of a light grey, and their intentness became momentarily increased now and again by a fretted knitting of the brows which brought into prominence a certain irregularity in their contour. This was the one flaw—if flaw it be reckoned—in a face which might otherwise have claimed to be perfect; the suave features of Saxon type gained thereby character and distinctness; it held there, in fact, the same value as the faint shadow of cloud in a Claude landscape.

The preliminary interchange as to weather and time of year having been got through, Tam George inquired, for satisfaction of the general interest—

“Have you footed it far to-day, master?”

“I have,” replied the stranger; “at any rate, what some would call far. What’s your distance?”

“Mine?” said Tam. “Oh, wheels is my trade; five miles on my legs is enough for me. Now, I suppose it wouldn’t have been you I passed on the road back from Warringford?” he added artfully.

“Hardly, as I happen to have come by another road.”

“Ah,—going to Warringford, maybe?”

“I don’t propose to do that to-night.”

“No, no; I take it not to-night,” said Tam George, as though concerned for the hospitality of the house. “This be on’y a small inn, but we’ve accommodation for chance comers. Not that there’d

be much room for a married couple, eh, landlord? but all right for a single man; and I suppose you be single?"

"Well, I've certainly not brought a wife with me," replied the stranger, continuing to fence inquisitive remarks with an air of candour.

As he spoke the distant clamour of a bell smote upon the ears of the assembly; it seemed a signal requiring attention; there was a general emptying of mugs and a knocking of ashes out of pipes.

"What is that?" inquired the new-comer.

"That," said Tam George, "is our Squire putting on his nightcap: it means good night for all of us."

"But your Squire has not arrived from town yet?" exclaimed the stranger; adding hastily, "And only nine o'clock: what a ridiculous hour!"

"Well, it be our hour all the same," remarked Long John; "and absent though he may be in the body, Squire he be present in the spirit, as we know. Wish you good night, stranger."

Good nights were now said by all, and the gathering rapidly dispersed. Left alone with the landlord and his wife, the stranger asked if he could have supper before going to bed.

"I suppose," said the innkeeper, rather doubtfully, "that you can have it since you are in the house, and come late; but I'll ask you to say nothing about it if you want liquor as well."

"What?" inquired the other; "are you not licensed up to ten o'clock?"

"Not here, I'm not," answered the innkeeper, with an impassive countenance; "my license hangs in that bell. Squire is my landlord, and I'm only here on a yearly holding. He makes his rules, and I have to keep 'em."

"The old ruffian!" remarked the stranger, genially.

The landlord looked round to see that no other member of the household was in hearing. He leaned across the table, and said impressively, with

a sincerity of conviction about which there could be no mistake —

“I tell you, sir, he’s a caution. There’s only one other man like him in the neighbourhood.”

“And who may that be?”

“Farmer Lorry. They are a couple, they are; and folk *say* there’s reason in it.”

## CHAPTER VI

### A DRIVE TO WARRINGFORD

HIGH words were reported to have taken place at the stables one morning between James Lorry and his son; the cause of their contention was not known.

For the old farmer's voice to be raised in anger was too daily an occurrence to excite interest, but that the other should trouble to reply was unusual, and caused remark. In the afternoon David had out the market-cart, and sent up word to Sabrina that he was starting for Warringford. She kept him waiting no more than two minutes. The farmer stood in the entrance and watched them go: he did not return his niece's greeting.

Seated by her cousin, after her first shy thanks to him for remembering her request, Sabrina became tongue-tied. They drove together in silence for more than a mile, she suffering from an embarrassment that did not wear off; he, apparently, finding no cause for conversation. When they had reached the open level of the heath, David abruptly inquired if she would like to drive.

"I can't," said Sabrina, and coloured as though she had said an awkward thing.

"Would you care to learn?"

"I would indeed!" she said, growing suddenly brave. David put the reins into her hands and showed her how they should be held. "I've been thinking," he remarked, after a time spent in instruction, "that you might like to have out the pony-

shay for your mother now and again; it would always be an easy matter if you could only drive it yourself."

"It is very kind of you to think of it," said Sabrina, too much engaged to say more.

Her colour was bright, her eyes fixed anxiously on the very middle of the track; she was so bent on the task of acquitting herself well, that an inclination to let her words fall in time with the trotting of the mare became apparent.

"Oh, not at all," said David, watching her as he spoke.

"My mother, I am sure, would like it, but for myself I prefer walking: I mean as an exercise."

"Ay, I've noticed you going about," remarked her cousin.

"Noticed me?"

"Up along the down; a stiff climb, that."

"The climb is what I like, only I never can keep straight, since there is no landmark to go by; when I make for the gap above Amesbay, which is my favourite point, I am always quite a hundred yards out of my reckoning before I get to the top."

"You should take your bearings from behind when there's nothing to go by in front."

"Oh, I'm not clever enough for that; no, I want posts. I wonder there is no path."

"Tracks don't come if there's no one to make them," observed David; "but there are coastguard pointings further up along top."

"What are they?" inquired Sabrina.

"Here and there a sprinkle of white pebbles, or stones with whiting rubbed on; 'tis all the coastguards have to go by when they make their beat."

"When do they do that?"

"Start at ten every night."

"In all weathers?—they do that here?"

"All round England, I believe."

"All round England! How wonderful that sounds!"

David did not seem to think it so wonderful. "Reason enough for it in smuggling times," said he; "up top there've been men killed before now. Maybe you'll have noticed a white stone halfway toward East Gill, with two men's names on it; they were coastguards."

"I had not noticed the names."

"My father remembers them; and a man thought to have had a hand in it still lives over at East Gill; a very old man he is now."

"How barbarian it all seems! Is there no smuggling now?"

"Not in these parts—it's only at the big ports that it pays nowadays."

"Ah, then, even that interest is gone now," remarked Sabrina, for whom, as for most women, certain kinds of law-breaking had their attraction. "You were at sea once, were you not, David?" she added.

"Ay, for a bit."

"Did you like it?"

"Better than some things."

"But I suppose now you have given it up for good?"

"It looks like it," he replied, as though the question hardly concerned him.

The mere inquiry had carried Sabrina's thoughts abroad.

"To travel has always been my dearest wish," she said, "and I suppose it is the most unlikely of fulfilment. Where have you been, David?"

"Oh, a many places — ports mostly."

"Foreign?"

"Some foreign — Marseilles was the biggest."

"Oh yes, Marseilles. And what was the farthest?"

David considered. "Venice, I suppose," he said at last.

"Venice! You have been to Venice?" She stared at him with amazement. "How long were you there?"

"Nigh on two months."

"In *Venice*?" Her tone was divided between envy and wonder. In all the world, could she have had her will, Venice was the spot she would have flown to. And yet her cousin, this man of vegetating life and dull routine, had been there and could be mute on it! "What did you do there?" she asked.

"Mostly lay in hospital."

"You were ill? Did you see nothing, then?"

"Oh, I went about a good bit at the finish."

"Tell me of it—what was it like? You saw St. Mark's?"

"Well, it was like other things, only a bit different; a good deal of shipping and a lot of church towers standing up like chimneys, and streets mostly under water."

"But St. Mark's itself?"

"Oh, that wasn't much; I never went in it. There was a big tower standing up alongside; I went to the top of that. You could see all the shipping from there."

"Really, David, you are too, too provoking! You never even went *into* St. Mark's?"

"No," the other mildly explained. "You see, I always went to church at the chaplain's. 'Twas the only place where English was spoken."

Sabrina could scarcely define the vexation she felt at this display of her cousin's deficiency of interests; it seemed to make for division just when she had been so eagerly cultivating friendly relations.

"I suppose," she said, in a deeply disappointed tone, "that things which mean everything to some people are nothing to others?"

"I didn't know that you cared so much about churches," replied David, in some perplexity.



"Oh, don't let's talk about it," said Sabrina. "I care nothing about them in the way you mean, and you care nothing in the way I mean. You might just as well have never been to Venice at all, for all the impression it seems to have left!"

"Well, I don't know that," said David, his face wearing a thoughtful air. Presently he said abruptly: "Now you are not driving at all!" Her interest had flown; on the excuse that she was tired, she resigned the reins. They entered Warringford somewhat silently.

Warringford is one of the few towns left in England which is still girdled by its ancient ramparts. Time has robbed them of their warlike aspect, and a stranger may enter the place without realizing that the grass-grown mounds to right and left had ever a defensive value. Such prominence as they still possess is due to the fact that the town which they still hold in a four-square embrace has shrunk rather than grown; while vegetation advancing by a stride has thrown itself in a green wave over the boundaries. In the grassy hollow which was once the town moat, children come to roll on the cleanliness of mother earth; and here at intervals gypsies and strollers pitch their cocoanut shies, and set up their swing-boats and merry-go-rounds; and the small sleepy town pants at life as with an attack of asthma.

Débris from one of these periodic disturbances still strewed the green way of the ramparts as they drove into the town. Arrived at their destination, it became evident that they had not much to do there. Sabrina's errands were soon finished, while David seemed to have had no other object in coming than to give his horse fodder and rest at the stables of the Blue Bear. When the moment came for them to leave the trap, Sabrina was ashamed of the conspicuous smallness of her parcels; they were indeed hardly worth leaving. To make up for so meagre an excuse for their expedition, she

began remarking with frank pleasure the quaintness of the place. The portico of the inn stood out over the pavement, and upon the top of it squatted the life-size effigy of the bear which was its sign. As she stepped out into the roadway for a better view, Sabrina's eyes were raised toward the windows of the first floor. Behind one of them she saw a very gay hat and a head of abundant fair hair. The owner of these attractions sat with her back to the window, and though in bright holiday attire, and with locks suggesting an accompaniment of youth and good looks, she would not have attracted more than passing notice but for one circumstance. Around her neck, and forming, as it were, a cushion for her head, appeared the fore part of a man's arm; to all that lay beyond the gay hat formed a screen; on neither side was there anything to break the silhouette of the head against the dark interior background. It was evident, unless the arm were a disjointed piece of humanity, that the young woman was going through the process of being kissed, and that the kiss was no mere passing salutation, but an affair of moment, or, to speak more strictly, of moments.

Sabrina withdrew her eyes from the privacy they had unwittingly invaded, and suggested to her companion a walk round the walls until the trap should be ready for their return. Passing the small Saxon church adjoining the site of the old north gate, they quitted the street by a sloping footpath which led immediately on to the ram-parts. Here upon one side lay a row of back premises, upon the other a short declivity led down to the river, which at this part forms a natural moat to the walls. On the nearer bank stood an old house once a mill, which appeared long since to have had all trade choked out of it. Mellowing moisture had invaded its walls from base to roof; a jumble of red gables hung locked in the grappling embrace of ivy that had passed

from the stage of the parasite to that of the predominant partner; it was, in fact, a perfect example of that picturesqueness in which modern sentiment delights, and which sanitary inspectors condemn. Through the open and uncurtained windows could be seen stacked furniture and rolls of bedding; evidently the occupants had but recently moved in.

A small urchin, squatting solitary on a hillock by the footway, got up as the two drew near, and inquired if it was yet tea-time. Sabrina asked him in return when his tea-time might be.

"Oh, no time!" said the child, in a thin gnat-like wail of forlorn misery. "But I do want my tea."

"Where do you live?" she inquired.

"I live down there," came the voice of his complaint. He pointed to the dismantled mill.

"It looks a very nice place to live in," said Sabrina, not quite honestly.

"Oh no!" went on the child, in a long-drawn wail of protest.

"Not nice, you say?"

"Oh no!—covered with rats!" The misery of the note was indescribable.

Sabrina began to feel a considerable pity for the small urchin. "Is that why you don't go home, except for meals?" she asked.

"Oh no!" came the desolate refrain once more, "Mother's having a baby." The picture of household misery was complete. "Can we not take him with us, and give him something?" inquired Sabrina of her companion. David remembered booths still standing on the fair-ground, where buns could be purchased. The child, invited to come, trotted solemnly beside them.

"Do you go to school?" asked Sabrina, after they had gone some way in silence.

Reproachful of her ignorance came the inevitable word—

"Oh no! I don't go to no school, I don't."

"Do you play, then?" There was no variation in the answer; before she heard it, Sabrina saw in the melancholy face the shadow of denial. Every question she put drew the same monotony of reply. Existence seemed to have impressed an overwhelming negative on the child's brain; he said "No" almost without waiting to understand what was asked.

At the place of booths, David gave him his choice of currant bun or plain.

"No currants," answered the boy; "they hurts my inside." Negation was to the fore even in the matter of appetite. He ate as one who saw the ghost of his bun looming ever before him; nor did even the promise of a second and a third lend to his eating a less funereal aspect.

The fair-ground on which they now stood bore more traces of departed attractions than standing ones left; gridiron marks on the turf showed where swing-boats had been recently set up; a circular track round a heap of cinders marked the site of a vanished merry-go-round; elsewhere could be traced the limits of a boxing-booth and the ground-plans of a couple of shooting-galleries. All that remained now were entertainments of the cheaper and less exciting kind. David nodded to one of a few youths standing about a "cocoanut shy," offering to go win or lose on his next shot. The lad threw and knocked down the nut; he looked rueful, having to hand it over, remarking —

"You've got your old luck, Mr. David."

David paid for him to have another shy on his own account, and handing the nut to the child, still solemnly munching at his bun —

"There's milk for your tea, my man," said he.

Sabrina, watching the balls as they flew, began to listen with relish to the thwack of every well-delivered blow. She turned to her cousin and said, smiling —

"Why don't you try, David?"

"'Twouldn't be quite fair," he replied. "I used to be a known hand at this game." He took up, as he spoke, one of the wooden missiles and approached the crease.

"No you don't!" cried the owner of the pitch, and snatched the ball back again.

"Only to try my hand," said David; "and any damage done I pay."

The man agreed. Six cocoanuts went down in a run without a single miss, three were broken by the impact. The on-lookers applauded; David's interest in his feat was entirely scientific.

"I was afraid I'd lost the knack," he remarked. "I used to be pretty good at it as a boy."

His speech sounded more like apology than boasting. Just then a gypsy-like fellow of middle age, owner of a donkey-cart which stood near, came up to ask if he might have the broken cocoanuts. Hearing him spoken to as Gage, Sabrina turned to look at him, and although his face did not impress her unfavourably, she moved slowly away so as to be quit of his company. An instinct of repulsion from certain forms of evil was strong in her, sometimes causing her to be unjust.

Upon the way home she made one or two inquiries concerning the man, and found David's tolerance little to her liking. "Wildish, but not a bad sort," was his verdict, yet with no particular reason to show on the good side. Having yet to learn that David spoke ill of no man, she was inclined to regard such tolerance as a laxity in morals.

As an outcome of this expedition Sabrina found that her liking for her cousin had increased, together with a certain disappointment in him. He was a good fellow, no doubt; but it would be affectation to deny that he was of a different class from her own. He belonged to the crops and the herds which were the sum of his labours, and like them, he was of the earth earthy, without ambition, or aim, or interest.

Having formed this view of him, it was with some compunction that she found, a few days later, a couple of guide-posts set up at intervals on the down, meant evidently to serve her as landmarks. She felt uncomfortably grateful, and wished he had not taken such trouble on her behalf.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUNDAY AND MONDAY

FARMER LORRY hobbled up to church on the Sunday, disdaining the aid of the refurbished pony-trap, which conveyed Mrs. Warham to her own place of worship. This and the parish church stood within a stone's throw of each other in the Castle grounds; and the history of their proximity serves in part to explain the cause of contention between squire and farmer.

Lutworths of old had held out against the Reformation changes, when the church which their ancestors had built fell into the practice of the new religion. For two centuries and more they, and those of their tenantry who had stood with them, had worshipped in such privacy as penal laws made obligatory. Then it chanced that one of the Lutworths, having secured the friendship of that unimpeachably Protestant monarch, George III., built for himself and his co-religionists, by royal favour and connivance, a chapel, which, under the outward semblance of an observatory, satisfied their spiritual wants while rendering eye-service to the claims of Protestant ascendancy.

During this period, headship in church matters had passed over to the Lorrays, and with it had gone the ownership of the majestic family pew, which crowned the accommodation of the sacred edifice. Thus when there stepped into the inheritance a younger branch of the Lutworth family, holding established views on religion, in the very

place where squirearchy goes usually to be worshipped an unseemly precedent was found to have been created; nor would the Lorrys on any consideration yield up their pride of place. The battle waged by the fathers had descended to the sons, and these in turn had grown hoary in a slow two-handed duel wherein neither party would yield jot or tittle to the other's claim.

Mrs. Warham had herself once played a mild part in these contentions. On her mother's death she had quitted her father's roof for that of the Castle bailiff, her maternal uncle, and her desertion of the family pew at that date was but a preliminary to her further descent into service which the Lorrys chose to regard as menial. From that she had been doubtfully raised by her marriage, but had never returned to the place of distinction in the eyes of an assembled congregation which she had resigned in her youth. David, to his father's disgust, had, on his return from sea, joined the choir in the west gallery; thus the old man, Sunday after Sunday, sat in cold solitude, sole occupant of a structure that would have accommodated a score.

With these materials of controversy were mixed the bones of a more ancient quarrel; rectorial rights were queerly divided in that parish between the Castle and the Monastery Farm. Through Lorry's hands came part of the vicar's stipend; he also had a theoretic share in the presentation of the living. His father had gone to law to make it effective, and had lost; and James Lorry, though he did not revive, had not abandoned the claim. So old was the division that a saying had grown up in the neighbourhood, acquiring after generations of usage a sort of superstitious value, for all the world as though Mother Shipton had cast a prophetic eye over the scene and uttered words of fate.

“Till Lutworth give or Lorry go,  
Lutworth and Lorry shall have woe.”



That sort of saying may be made to mean anything, and can therefore the more easily obtain credence and fulfilment. The superstitiously inclined might point to circumstances in the past which seemed, through some fever of the blood, to connect the fates of the Lutworths and the Lorrys. Mrs. Warham's marriage, though it had put the extinguisher on a certain scandal, had been followed by a lurid event not satisfactorily explained to all minds by Tam George's version of it. And now again something was beginning to be whispered concerning the continued absence of Lady Berrers' daughter. But against all that was to be set the fast friendship which had existed since their return from foreign parts between that most harum-scarum branch of the Lutworth blood, young master Ronald, and David Lorry; it made the other talk decidedly improbable. Lady Berrers had found David lying in a seaman's hospital, weak from the loss of hot blood, spilled through a moment's folly and ignorance of what southern custom will allow. With a neighbourly, perhaps with a motherly feeling for a youth so stranded, she had lightened his convalescence by her kindness, and persuaded him at last back to his home. Farmer Lorry, owing the enemy a debt, grudged its acknowledgment; he grudged even more the David and Jonathan friendship between his own son and one of the Lutworth breed; for though David went no step out of his way to meet it, he was receptive of the youth's company; and Ronald, who loved to trespass, thus found excuse for hanging about the premises at all hours, and for officious interference among the stables and pigsties, where he had been bidden never to set foot.

The arrival of the Castle party caused, therefore, both on public and on domestic grounds, a souring of Farmer Lorry's outlook on the world.

On this particular Sunday, however, Master

Ronald was still absent; he was not expected for a fortnight. Lady Berrers was there, and looking well; which, by comparison with the average of looks, meant very well indeed. It had been said of her that her smile was like a bow, her bow like a smile; and this radiance, which had won her the favour of society, made her also a consummate grand lady to those of humbler rank. Could there be in this world such a thing of contradiction as a stately romp, Lady Berrers was that. She romped in the grand manner, from the sheer joy of living; she overflowed into gay movement, yet retained her state. The courtier who so happily described her smile and her bow, gave this as her full-length portrait: in repose a banquet, in motion an elopement. She was gracious to a fault, yet no word had ever been breathed against her reputation. Widow to two diplomatists — an active and a retiring one — she had dipped into foreign courts and come out of them more English than ever. A great foreign minister assured her, when with her second husband, Lord Berrers, she withdrew from diplomacy, that she had once saved her country from war. She was dying to know how, innocent of the intention. "I fell in love with you!" he explained simply. Her answer, "There would have been war had Lord Berrers known!" gave, perhaps, a good reason for the retirement from service of an old nobleman with a young wife. Her marriages were explained by a remark which she made in her second widowhood when asked what she thought to be a true reason for existence. "I mix my reason with my passion," she replied. "I have a passion for being fallen in love with by elderly men." To be able to say this meant that she had done with marriage; two memories she thought were enough to be faithful to; she was grateful to both, and argued that a daughter by a first husband allowed a division of her widowhood between two.

Imagine the lady, whose character is here presented to you — still an acknowledged beauty though fifty, with dark eyes dartingly piercing, and a mouth never slow at mirth; imagine her so placed when in church as to command a direct view forward upon Farmer Lorry's profile, able to make him conscious of her while without excuse for returning the directness of her gaze; imagine that power habitually exercised, and you may then understand that the farmer, sitting in the vast emptiness of his pew, so useless and so disputed a territory, was, after all, a man of courage, and perhaps worth fighting. And Lady Berrers, as you now know, had a passion for being fallen in love with by elderly men!

She was one who could not dislike what amused her; and the war between old Lorry and the Squire amused her vastly; she enjoyed even her secondary position in church because of it; it helped her, she said, to pray humbly, giving her an example of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, more instructive than any image or sermon. The remark showed that she could make much of small things, for the flesh upon Farmer Lorry's bones was little indeed; long ago she had called him the "Devil's ascetic," imputing his notorious ill-humours to a prolonged abstinence from human charity.

As no one could say what were the farmer's true views regarding her, feminine curiosity was perhaps at the root of her inability to let him alone. On this occasion Lorry had been beforehand in getting to the church-door, though she ran him a race; he had missed, therefore, as he had intended to, the flowing bow with which, after a long absence from her native parish, she always greeted him.

During service a shawl which she had laid across the book-rest slid over into the farmer's pew, and fell upon the seat. A little time after, during the singing, a small Prayer-book toppled

at a chance touch, and rejecting the seat, reached the floor. Farmer Lorry behaved circumspectly and without haste; turning from his book he looked first through his spectacles, then over them at the intruding articles; then he walked down the pew, and handed back, in the order of their coming, first the shawl, which by courtesy he might have left; then the book, which without rudeness he could not.

It was a triumph, and Lady Berrers knew it; if she had been playing him tricks, the farmer had worsted her.

The lady had come to church that day with a certain curiosity; informed of Sabrina's return to the neighbourhood, she had looked forward to seeing her, not merely as being her mother's daughter. Rumour had acclaimed her beauty; and Lady Berrers had reason for wishing it to be true. Seeing the farmer solitary, she supposed that filial kindness had kept mother and daughter together, and was ready to approve so humane a laxity of creed.

Her surmise, however, was wrong: Sabrina would willingly have worshipped at her mother's side under an alien formula; but in religion Mrs. Warham was austere, almost forbidding; an element of Calvinism had survived her change of faith, causing her instinctively to repulse from the intimacies of her spiritual life one whom she regarded as an unbeliever. Both in conduct and doctrine Sabrina failed to give her parent the requisite assurance as to her spiritual welfare. She had once indeed been to the parish church, but had found the hard formalism of the service too trying. Her most vivid recollection was of a kneeling row of school children, clinging miserably to a high book-rest like shipwrecked mariners to a spar; and she doubted much of a system of prayer which gave "misereres" to the young and cushioned support to those whose consciences were ripe in sin. Had

there been no other drawback, the Lorry pew would have decided her. Occasionally she attended service in a neighbouring parish, but she was not a regular church-goer, and her mother, in consequence, did not reckon her a Christian.

Monday morning has its moods, differing from those of other days. To practical minds it is the true first day, which sees action sprout once more from the dull mould of sabbath rest; to the more passive it is a day for mental and physical digestion, and brings with it small sign of grace.

Farmer Lorry sat on the porch-bench in the morning sun, and looked out over his farm. Like the mainspring of a clock while the tick of the works goes on and the cogs move round, he sat with his energies coiled, his leisure a sign of power. Over the lower slope of the opposite down went a plough, leaving in its wake fat ribs of purple earth; David's was the directing hand, Farmer Lorry made claim to the directing mind.

A spell of fair weather was promised by the direction of the wind and the high drift of feathering clouds; it was a day when a farmer might reckon on a week well in hand for good ends; the ground was ripe for ploughing, and much waited to be done. Having sent his son forth into the fields, Farmer Lorry sat there to keep an eye on him.

While he thus sat ruminating, his niece, pleasantly arrayed to meet the sunshine, came out of the house and threw him too confident a greeting. As he had particular dislike for people to be pleased with themselves till he chose to be pleased with them, Sabrina's good humour offended him. Sour as could be, he returned her salutation.

"So it's fine enough for ye to be out, is it?" he inquired, as though indoor coddling were her practice. "Thought you'd do a bit of a show-off, eh?"

"I thought it looked promising," said Sabrina. "Is it likely to rain, do you think?"

"Yes, it'll rain next week; you may be sure of that."

"Oh, I hope to be in again before then," she said, smiling at his crustiness.

"Indeed? Going into Warringford, I suppose? Well, you can't have horse or trap to-day for that business—or man either."

"I shouldn't think of expecting it; the other day David kindly offered to take me."

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, you see he's back at work now. He's no time for gadding—and he doesn't, when I look after him."

James Lorry felt it necessary to make show of his authority; an object-lesson was needed, and here was the occasion. A farm-boy was just then going down toward the gate; the farmer called him back.

"Go and tell David I want him," said he.

The lad departed on his errand. Over the breadth of two fields, Sabrina watched David driving his laborious furrow; and began calculating where he would be by the time the messenger reached him. Behind his track flew a flock of white sea-birds; wheeling and dipping, ever attendant, they seemed in haste to alight upon each fresh foot-print; their shadows fell on him, their wings almost brushed him.

The sight appealed to her, suggesting a natural harmony in things, a notion that there must be something gentle in one whom white birds cared thus to follow. Following her thought, she cried—

"How tame they are!"

"Tame? What?" said Lorry. "The horses?"

"No, the sea-gulls; they seem to be so friendly."

"Oh, friendly you call that? Don't you know what they're after?"

Sabrina confessed ignorance.

"Worms," said the old man, maliciously. "Did you think, now, they were angels?"

"I'm afraid I didn't think enough," she answered, a little vexed that beauty could be so baldly explained.

"Ah," said the farmer, "they are only human like the rest of us. Victuals is what makes matrimony. When you marry it's victuals you'll be a'ter, though you'll be for giving it some fancy name of your own, flapping around just like them birds, and thinking yourself an angel, maybe, all the while."

"Only that now I shall know better," said Sabrina, smiling.

The old man grunted, paying little attention; purpose was in his eye. The farm-boy had now arrived within hailing distance of David; his voice could be heard delivering the message, though not the actual words. Answered by interrogation, the lad drew nearer. After a short colloquy, David resumed his ploughing; the boy returned alone.

All this was clear to the farmer's eye; he made no comment, sitting mute till the messenger approached.

"Please, sir, he do say he'll be back at dinner-time!" was the answer rendered.

Storm gathered over the farmer's brow.

"Come a-nigh! Come a-nigh!" he shouted, as the lad hung back. "What had you said to him? What message did you give him?"

"I told 'un as how you wanted 'un!" said the boy, faithfully rehearsing his part. "And then 'a said, 'What for?' and I said, 'I dunno, but he said it.' And then 'a said as, if 'twas for anything special, you was to let 'un know, and if not 'a'd be back by dinner-time; and then I come away."

Lorry rose, gesticulating. "Be off, back to him!" he shouted, waving an angry arm. "And you—say—I—say—he's—to—come! And mind,

now, if you don't make him come back this time, I'll skin yer!"

Sabrina's sudden departure from the scene did not allay the farmer's wrath. That she should have looked on his discomfiture without staying to see the culprit brought to heel aggravated David's offence. Yet it turned out to be well that she had retired when she did. David kept his word, returning to the house at dinner-time; meeting him then, the farmer said nothing.

In the afternoon he chanced on his niece again, and was almost gracious to her. On this excuse and on that, he drew her after him from one part to another of the farm-buildings, showed her the stables, the pigs, and the turkeys, had out for inspection a young Jersey bull, newly arrived; in fine, though queer and fidgety, he treated her as one free of the premises. Meanwhile his eye roved; David was nowhere about. On learning from one of the men that his son was out on a distant part of the farm, his manner toward Sabrina altered.

"Well, as you seem to be going somewhere, I'll not keep you," he remarked; and, so saying, he moved off toward the house, dropping her as abruptly as he had a short while before sought her company.

Sabrina having errands to do in the village, resumed her interrupted course. Just by the first group of cottages she met Lottie Gage coming from the Park gates.

The girl's pretty face bore signs of recent distress, and at the sight of a friendly countenance the ready tears came flowing.

"Oh, miss," she cried in tones of entreaty, "I know you will be kind to me; I know you will!"

Sabrina, thus appealed to, asked what was the matter.

"It comes of my going down to nurse aunt,"



said the girl; "they say I've been coming back too late, and you know, miss, how things have hindered and been in the way, one thing with another, when I've wanted to get back. So I've just given notice, and then I can be with aunt as much as I like and nobody say anything against it; and it's nothing to look forward to, I'm sure!"

Sabrina was touched and surprised at the girl's readiness to make such a sacrifice; nevertheless, she doubted the prudence of the step.

"Are you quite sure that you will be able to get on with your aunt?" she asked.

"Oh yes, I've always got on with her somehow," answered the girl. "And I must be free, yes, I must; I feel I must!" She spoke passionately.

Any longing for freedom Sabrina could well understand.

"Well, Lottie, if you must," she said kindly, "I will be sure to come in as often as I can and help you. Why, my child, what is the matter?"

They had turned aside from the road, and were now alone together on the path leading to the heath. Lottie's small grief had suddenly changed into a storm of weeping.

"Oh, it's hard, it's hard!" she cried, "I get no time to call my own, but I do love him so, and I see him such a little short time, and some days I can't see him at all! And I know he'll go away. I know, I know—though he says he loves me. I can't expect him to love me ever, and faithful, if I don't do what he asks!"

Sabrina had never before received such confidences; she found her ears suddenly exposed to the artless expression of a passionate girl's heart-trouble.

"Who is *he*, Lottie?" she inquired gently.

The girl wept tenderly; her heart was so full of the image that she had no name for it. It was he, her lover; and she wept, fearing that he would be lost to her.

"Oh, you don't know what it is, do you, miss?" she inquired, without a thought of any case but her own.

And Sabrina listened and wondered, and was not envious.

"He's a stonemason," she went on. "Yes, and he works for Government on the new harbour they're building over at Wedport; and he's bound to have a rise soon, he says, and then he'll have a house of his own where he can take me; but I'm to stay on here till then, he says; and oh, I wasn't to tell anybody, and now I've been and told you; but you'll keep it a secret for me, won't you, miss? There's another young man who wants me, a coast-guard, and he's very respectable, and I was fond of him once, but I haven't encouraged him at all, not since — not since I made up my own mind. And I don't want him to know; why should he? It would only hurt him; and aunt would get to know of it. It will be time enough to tell them when everything else has been settled for me to go. Oh, dear, dear, Miss Sabrina, it all seems such a tangle not being able to do what one wants, and having to do what's right! I wonder whatever you must think of me!"

"I suppose what you feel is very natural," replied her companion; "but I don't think it is very wise, Lottie."

"Oh yes, it must be," pleaded the other; "you'd understand, miss, if you was only to see him."

"Should I?" Sabrina smiled a little to herself over the girl's infatuation for this ideal among stonemasons. "I think, Lottie," she went on, "that you are much too young and inexperienced to be wise in keeping such a thing secret. Are you quite, quite sure that he is in earnest, this lover of yours?"

"Oh yes, miss, that I am!" and the girl's eyes grew tender. "I wish I could make you understand how well I know!"

"I almost wish you could," answered Sabrina

and a spark of something like envy entered her heart as she spoke. This young girl, pretty, but not very wise, light of mind and of speech, and with no great sense of duty in her, seemed lifted by her passion to another scale of being; not only was there a certain poetry in her abandonment of mood and in her singular humility with regard to her lover, but there was in looks and manner a corresponding elevation which made her a different person. A sort of loveliness fell over the face, giving to what had before been mere prettiness, an indescribable touch of character, a frail and pathetic strength, not of will or of intellect, but of devotion. Millais' picture of the Huguenot's wife conveys in paint this ultimate expression of womanliness which makes so overpowering an appeal to some men's minds. Even to Sabrina, though she was no longer deceived as to Lottie's motive in quitting service, this revelation of a heart possessed by passion was curiously attractive. She felt sorry for the girl with a springing fondness, not understanding, perhaps, how much this impulsive confidence from another filled a need in her own heart. Nevertheless she counselled prudence; receiving in return more gratitude than attention.

The two walked on together to the cottage. On entering, Lottie suddenly dropped a deep curtsy. Within the door stood Lady Berrers.

"I have been in to see your aunt, Charlotte," said she; "but I don't think she wants me. Ah, and she certainly will not now."

Sabrina was aware of a direct and friendly gaze; then with none of that awkward pause of strangers dubious at meeting, the lady addressed her quickly and to the point.

"Tell me, but I feel sure I know—are not you Miss Warham?"

Sabrina took the offered hand, while the other continued—

"I hear you are staying with your mother?"

I am so glad to meet you." It was the phrase of mere ordinary politeness, rather warmly expressed, but Lady Berrers still held her hand. "Yes," she said, nodding, "you are your mother's daughter. Charlotte, now you are here, I am sure your aunt wants neither of us. I am going to take Miss Warham away for a few minutes." She turned to Sabrina: "That is, if you will come?"

"Since you wish it, with pleasure."

Lady Berrers again directed upon Sabrina a full and friendly regard. When they were in the open she spoke —

"Miss Warham, I said that I was glad to meet you, and I am. I trust that there are many reasons why I should be so; but there is one that only indirectly concerns yourself. I wish to pay my respects to your mother."

"Yes?" replied the girl. "Indeed that is very kind of you; but is there any difficulty?"

"There is the difficulty that she will not see me. When I first knew that she was coming back to live here, I wrote to welcome her. From her answer I understood that she wished to be left alone. At that time of fresh and sudden bereavement, I could not intrude; but now I wish that I might venture. We were old friends, and nothing but time has estranged us. So now I am asking you to help me."

"I shall be happy if I may," said Sabrina; "but ——" She paused, then added, "I cannot tell what my mother's feeling in the matter may be."

"I know already — she wishes not to see me."

"Then — in that case?"

"Yes, then; it is in that case precisely that I wish your help."

"You think, madam, that it can serve any good purpose?"

"To see her against her will? Yes, I do think so."

The face Sabrina looked at seemed to invite

acquaintance; it beckoned her on with generous looks, with encouragement. She thought of it set down in her mother's small parlour, a radiating influence, a light of human warmth amid its general air of restraint, and she smiled, saying at last —

“I think so, too.”

“There is my point gained, then!” the lady replied. “Think it over and let me know what can be done. I will not be in a hurry, though I am much set on the meeting. Are you,” she added, “intending to return to the cottage? I am taking you away.”

“I think I must go in and speak to Lottie for a minute.”

“Ah, you know her, then? What is that little puss up to? She is flighty and difficult, and I hear that she has given up her place. Has she the right friends? She is much too pretty and silly to look after herself properly.”

“She tells me that she is leaving in order to nurse her aunt,” said Sabrina, keeping counsel.

“That is not a permanency or, necessarily, a duty. If you have influence with her, persuade her to marry. She has the chance, I am told, and one that she is not likely to better. Do you,” she added, suddenly changing the conversation, “do you like the place now you are here — and the people?”

“Some of the people very much.” But she let the question as to place go unanswered.

“I hope that includes all important ones?” said the lady, and Sabrina suddenly smiled.

“It should,” she said, “when I meet such kindness from them.”

Quick thought, and the genuine liking which she felt for this new great lady acquaintance, had prompted the word. Directly it was said she feared that she had spoken too freely in thus giving to the question the play of a meaning that was not

meant. She blushed warmly, and made a tentative move toward going.

Lady Berrers nodded, a wealth of approval in her smile.

"That is as it should be," she said. "We meet again. When you have brought me and your mother together, I shall not be contented to call you Miss Warham any more."

## CHAPTER VIII

### A MEETING

A SLIGHT indisposition which confined Mrs. Warham to her bed for a few days caused Sabrina to postpone mention of Lady Berrers' proposed visit. She was in doubt how best to approach the subject, or by what argument to persuade her mother to reconsider her past decision, knowing well that character of soft obstinacy, and how permanent were its resolutions when once made.

Taking advantage of her mother's temporary need of continual attendance, to test her own usefulness as nurse and companion, Sabrina stayed much in the house, only going out to do errands or for a short walk toward evening.

A week's experience brought her miserably to the conclusion that her presence served in a way to diminish the invalid's comfort. Mrs. Warham preferred, it seemed, to forego service which she would have required from Betty without scruple, merely because her daughter was there waiting to render it. And all her unselfish refusal of aid and constant choice of solitude rather than companionship were intended as a set discipline and admonition to the daughter whom she loved but disapproved. If her actions had been interpreted into words, their meaning could scarcely have been more clear; in each gentle refusal of service Sabrina heard her condemnation spoken: "You cannot be a companion to me, my dear!"

And it was true, — she could not; for with

renewed intimacy the fundamental opposition of their characters became apparent. Sabrina could listen in silence to her mother's complaisant views of the world and the ways of Providence; but she could make no response. So much that the one thought right the other thought wrong; and while the younger woman never dreamed of blaming the other for what she regarded as a credulous form of faith, she felt herself constantly blamed for the lack of it. "You must be wrong," her mother once said to her, "if you do not love God." And Sabrina had remained silent on that question of "mine and thine" which was behind all,—on the different meanings which may be given to the same word.

In spite of small alleviating incidents, her days were desolate in their lack of purpose; it seemed as though her brain had made a solitude for her heart. In all this life what was there that promised any interest, apart from filial solicitude thwarted of its aim? Her new friend, Lady Berrers, was but an occasional visitor, whose true home was the gay world. In her cousin David she feared to have already discovered the limits of interest, though not of liking; the romance of his sea voyages on examination had become prose; he was just good earth, a producer of local crops. Only Lottie remained: what of her? A poor foolish little thing made sublime by her love for a stonemason, worthy enough, perhaps, in his way. When her aunt died she would probably marry and become a household drudge, and her beauty and romance would then die a common death.

This was Sabrina's world and she viewed it with small satisfaction. The monotony of the bare featureless downs was typical of her daily outlook on life: chance travellers across that close and shut-in horizon made an event. Amid this general lack, one small matter had aroused interest in her mind as a problem set for her to solve. With an almost daily regularity at the fall of dusk she saw



the light-clad figure already described crossing the barrel of the down, and descending upon the by-road to Warringford. The hour changed with the shortening of the days: it was as a messenger of twilight that the pedestrian arrived. Since she had first noticed and definitely looked out for him, only twice in a dozen times had he failed to appear.

Curiosity to learn what kind of a man this was, whom nightfall seemed to signal from tracks without habitation, led Sabrina one evening, on going for her walk, to direct her steps toward the down. Mounting in line with the two posts which David had set up for her guidance, she advanced along the ridge westward in the direction of the small stone bearing inscription of dead men's names. From the point where this stands a gully descends sharply to the sea, the route no doubt chosen by the smugglers when the fatal collision took place. Below, the down breaks halfway into a sort of terrace, along which lies the rough track used by the coastguards on their beat.

As she reached the stone, now standing whitely above the embrowning shadows of the turf, Sabrina heard the sound of footsteps on the loose rubble of the gully and the clatter of falling stones. Presently a head emerged, then the entire figure of a man, whom without difficulty she recognized as the stranger she had so often seen from a distance.

Encountering in a lonely spot makes it difficult for human beings to pass each other with the air of stolid unconsciousness due on ordinary occasions. In a street it is easy to look away; in a desert you find it impossible.

The stranger brought face to face at this solitary altitude with a woman beautiful and young, lifted his hat in conventional salutation; then, as though to excuse the action, paused, saying—

“Pardon me, can you tell me if this path will take me to Cover Cliff, the coastguard station?”

Sabrina, though well aware that the question

was a forced one, was compelled to give the required information.

"There is no path," she answered, "but the down is all open from here. I can hardly direct you further; being a stranger, I know little of the country."

As she spoke she eyed speculatively this constant comer who now pretended so complete an ignorance of the locality. Her scrutiny gave a favourable summing-up of his bearing: he was tall, well-set, his features, darkened by the deep western glow behind him, showed character; possibly he was handsome; and he had none of that sham deference of demeanour by which some men seek to win favour with women who happen to be fair.

"I am a stranger also," he said. "I chose this route that I might see more of the country. One seldom finds natives admiring their own scenery. I might have guessed you were a stranger: that is what brings you here."

"Yes," replied Sabrina, with a slight consciousness of manner.

His conversation was a little too ready for her taste; she wished to move on, but felt herself held.

"Then you can give me no direction by landmarks?" he resumed, seeing a tentative movement on her part.

Sabrina humoured the fiction in order to have done with it.

"Amesbay lies there," she said, pointing, "under that headland: there above it lies a camp. About three miles to the further side of that is Cover Cliff. I do not know how you get there; the ground is steep and rough; but it is all quite open."

"I am greatly obliged," answered the other. "Forgive me for having troubled you."

Saluting once more, he pursued his way; Sabrina went hers. Passing from sight, his figure still

remained clearly imprinted on her memory; it prompted speculation, curiosity. There was something striking and distinctive about the man's appearance. Though his garb was rough and soiled, she detected in it his degree; there could be no doubt he was what the world styles a gentleman. He seemed a poor man, yet a man of independence; of good address, but without convention; of gentle birth, but not of refined breeding; country, she thought, rather than town bred; yet it might be only his costume which made her think so. Endeavouring to estimate his exact standing, and failing, she found her interest in him increase.

Scarcely had she moved on when she again heard footsteps behind her.

"It seems that I am fated to intrude," said the stranger, ranging alongside. "The fact is, I have dropped my tobacco pouch, and have come back to look for it."

Sabrina's eyes instinctively sought the ground. "What was it like?" she asked. "I fear you will hardly find it in this fading light."

"Ah, but I must; pray, don't you trouble! If I can't find it now I will come again. We men are the slaves of habit; and though it seems absurd, I cannot be happy unless I have my own particular pouch about me."

"Then I hope you will be able to find it," said Sabrina.

"Oh yes, I am quite sure to."

Again they parted; Sabrina ought by this time to have been turning home, but to avoid the awkwardness of another encounter, she walked on slowly for a couple of hundred yards. When at last she turned she saw him disappearing in the distance, and was free therefore to begin retracing her steps with all speed. She supposed he must have found the object of his search, till, coming to the small obelisk, she perceived lying at the foot of it a dark pouch bearing a monogram; the letters

"V. R." in silver throwing back the reflection of the west caught her eye.

The stranger was now too far for recall; all she could do was to take present charge of the property, and wait to find means for returning it to its owner.

Descending from the ridge of the down by its eastern slope she found herself suddenly in an atmosphere already steeped in night; only a few yards below the level of the crest twilight became merged in darkness. The rough burred surface of the turf, ribbed where it caught the light by innumerable protuberances and hollows, became, as the ground descended, vague and uniform. She trod uncertainly, fearing that she might set foot in some pit or burrow unawares; the short grass had already become slippery with dew.

While she progressed with caution, avoiding here and there an extra steepness of the descent, her attention was caught by a faint rattling of chains apparently at no great distance to her left. She paused to listen; the sound seemed to come out of the earth itself; it stopped, and went on again. As she advanced, curious to discover what it might be, the rattling became more quick and incessant, a metallic paroxysm, issuing from the turf. A slight fear took hold of her at the proximity of a thing so definite, so unexplainable. Presently she discerned, almost underfoot, a soft body of shade bounding in short tethered jerks this way and that; to these movements the rattlings formed an accompaniment. Suddenly she comprehended what she saw: it was a rabbit caught in a trap. Terror and compassion fought in her for mastery; compassion prevailed, she stepped down to give instant relief to the shadowy anguish there beating itself to earth; the rabbit squealed and strained. "Oh, oh!" cried Sabrina, setting her foot on the leaping trap. She pressed, and felt the jaws give, and the last tug of a maimed limb snatching itself free. Off went the

creature to its hole. She took her foot from the trap; she was trembling, and could scarcely stand. Then again she was aware, as before, of the rattling of chains, and now not in one place only, but there, and there, — scattered all over the dark side of the down, near and far.

It was useless, she believed, yet she could not resist the call, so passed from point to point directed by the sound, and came always on the same miserable thing, and gave misery its release. In one case the tethering-stake stood at the entrance of a burrow; trap and victim had disappeared underground; and as she reached down to effect the release, she heard the scream of panic come muffled from the bowels of earth.

After each unlocking of a trap, she stood erect, and listened fearfully. She had set free no fewer than a score before silence came as a reward. And the hill was silent also, nursing its heart of pain.

## CHAPTER IX

### A VISITATION

THE next morning Sabrina gave the pouch to her cousin, asking him to have it returned to its owner. She told how he might probably be found.

"Comes over the down, does he, toward evening?" said David. "I'd better give this to Giles, then."

"Who is Giles?"

"He's the rabbit man."

"Ah, the rabbit man! What does that mean?" she inquired, with sudden keenness.

"It means the trapping; he pays for the rights."

"What!" cried Sabrina. "Did you know of it? Why, it's horrible!" She told him her experience of the previous night.

"Yes," said David; "it's been like that a many years."

"I let them all go!" she said; — "all that I could find."

"Well, I suppose that's natural; but you mustn't do it, Sabra; you're making the man lose his bargain." He smiled with grim amusement. "Eh, I reckon Giles was in a rare taking when he came to his traps this morning — for you didn't set 'em again, I suppose?"

"Set them again?"

"No, of course not. Well, I'd better explain to him."

"But must it go on?" cried Sabrina, in horror at the thought.

"What's to help it? It's only like a hundred other things — and you just come on this one — it's no good thinking about. I'll see if I can get him to give a look round of an evening to clear 'em up; but I doubt he has too much on his hands."

Sabrina fell into dejection. "Now," she said, "I shall always be thinking of that cruelty when I look out!"

And David, having nothing comfortable to say on the matter, held his peace.

His cousin then inquired after her uncle, whom she had not seen for several days, and, learning that he was confined to his chair by an unusually severe attack of lumbago, she seized her opportunity. In speaking to David she had learned to be more at ease; so, without too great an effort, she now said —

"If I may, I would like to come in and see him this evening? Shall I be allowed?"

"To be sure," said David; "I'll tell him you're coming, and thank you, cousin Sabra."

The way in which the word was said won her gratitude. Sabrina turned to him with something almost of affection in her glance, saying gratefully —

"Do you know you are very kind to me, David?"

And then she went away. And when she had passed quite out of sight David also went back to his work.

That proved to be a day of visits. An hour later a groom arrived from the Castle bearing a note for Miss Warham. With a face brighter from the reading of its contents, she entered her mother's room.

"Mother," she said, "I am going to ask you to do two people a favour."

"What kind of a favour?" inquired the widow.

"A kindness. Will you let Lady Berrers come and see you? She wishes it. And there is now a further reason: I did not tell you before — it seemed

such a forlorn hope. When I last advertised for work it was not as governess, but as a secretary or librarian. Lady Berrers has seen my advertisement, and has written about it. Would it not be strange if I were to have charge of the library which my father arranged and catalogued? She writes that it has been much neglected."

Mrs. Warham received the news in ominous silence.

"I do not think," said she at last, "that it would be a suitable or a womanly occupation."

This remark, the reader must remember, was made very nearly thirty years ago; and Mrs. Warham was old-fashioned even then.

Sabrina's answer was not without guile. "If that is your feeling, will you talk it over with Lady Berrers? I am to see her this afternoon; but I will settle nothing. May I bring her?"

"If it were my duty, I would, of course, see her," said the widow.

To which her daughter, as though the point were now conceded, replied—

"Your duty, then, will be her pleasure. May I say that you also will be pleased?"

"You had better say 'honoured,'" answered Mrs. Warham. "Few pleasures remain for me in this life; and in such a meeting there will be pain, for it will revive memories I have tried to forget." When she added, "I must wear my best dress," Sabrina understood that sanction to the proposal had been given.

In the afternoon, when Lady Berrers arrived, Sabrina was with her.

"You go in first," said she, "and tell her that I am coming. That will give her the time she likes for preparation. Oh, how well I remember her little ways!"

When her visitor was announced, Mrs. Warham rose, and, making a deep curtsy, stood without further advance.



"Oh, indeed and indeed no!" cried the lady, all warmth and smiles, when on her nearer approach a formal hand was offered. "Are you pretending to have forgotten me, Martha?" She bent and kissed the withered cheek, inquiring, "Have I, then, changed so much?"

"It is very good of your ladyship to remember me," replied the other from a barricade of ceremony.

But the great lady was not to be denied. "Now, could I forget you—could I?" she demanded, fondling the frail hand. "And have I not been always wanting to come, and you never would let me?"

"Your ladyship must remember that I have been an invalid for years. Pray, will you not be seated?"

Lady Berrers turned to Sabrina. "Your mother hardens her heart to me," she exclaimed pathetically. "Would you know why? Twenty-five, thirty years ago, I—a mere chit of a girl, too young to know better—did my best to shine in spite of her, to dispute her claim to be called the most beautiful woman in the country! Oh, your daughter shall hear of it now! She had only to appear, and I was nowhere; but that she never would do, and for that—though why, Heaven knows!—she still will not forgive me. Can any one explain it?"

"Indeed, my lady," interposed Mrs. Warham, "I have always remembered your great kindness, though it recalls days which, to me, are chiefly a subject for regret—days of folly and vanity."

"You, my Martha! Folly and vanity? Why I never knew a woman make less of what nature had given her; you put yourself under a bushel always. Turn to the light and let me look at you! Why, it is all there still; I see it, though nobody else would. The dear! Why, she is blushing! Sabrina—no, I can't call you Miss Warham when it's your mother I'm talking about!—if I declare to you that she was at thirty-five what you are now, you will

think nothing of it, so what can I say? I will say this, that there was nobody then whom I admired as I did your mother—nobody; and I never have since, until just the other day.”

It was Sabrina's turn to blush then; but she understood well enough that Lady Berrers' lively run of compliments was the cover of some deeper emotion which she was at pains to hide. More unexpected and strange was the effect of this visit on her mother. The widow's face was flushed; and, in spite of a certain agitation, there was pleasure as well—something of youth had returned to the worn countenance. Sabrina watched, and the indifference grew plain—her mother had become human. As Lady Berrers pressed her hand and fondled it, an answering smile began to concede the renewal of old ties.

“I have made a vow,” said the lady, “that you shall call me Janet before I go.”

“Oh, my lady, I could not!” cried the widow, aghast.

“No, not as a custom, but for once, that I may hear old times.”

“It was *Miss* Janet always.”

“And you remember the part that has perished; how like you that is! Am I to remain a beggar?”

In the end she got her way. So, too, in that other matter which was the ostensible cause of her visit. She left with Sabrina's acceptance of employment, for a few hours daily, as reorganizer of the Castle library.

The girl's gratitude to her kind patroness was mixed with a renewed discontent against herself; it appeared to her that this short visit from Lady Berrers had done Mrs. Warham more good than the whole of her own long sojourn.

But if this visit brought good results, she was not to have the same satisfaction over that which she paid to her uncle the same evening after Mrs. Warham had retired to rest.

Old Lorry was prepared for her coming, a circumstance not likely to aid matters; for he was a broody one, a chewer of the cud of enmity, and in malice hard to be beaten. Crippled, not daring to move lest the twinges of his malady should seize him, he had sat all day long in his chair by the fire fixing his mind to his purpose. Thus nine hours had been profitably spent, when Sabrina, holding the breath of her resolve, lifted the latch and entered.

At the far end of the chamber some half-dozen farm labourers sat smoking; an oaken screen divided the room in half, lending a sort of privacy to the upper portion; against the partition stood a long dresser, upon which was set forth a goodly display of old pewter, the family plate of the establishment. Mrs. Willings, the mute, middle-aged housekeeper, a docile product of the farmer's domestic training, sat at mid-distance, and stitched. In a species of inner chamber formed by the broad ingle the farmer reclined alone. David was among the men; he came forward with a word of welcome when the opening door revealed their visitor.

Farmer Lorry turned his head stiffly and with precaution; blinking small eyes, he greeted his niece with sardonic courtesy.

"Oh, so you've come to call on us, have you. I'm sure we be much obliged to 'ee for the compliment. David, man, look to your manners, and give your lady-cousin a chair!"

Sabrina was bent on resolute action to break down the barrier she disapproved.

"Give me a welcome first, uncle, so that I may feel I am not intruding," she said hardily. "I don't want to be looked on as a visitor, living in the house as I do now."

"Ah, don't you, now; don't you?" remarked the farmer, in mock cordial tones. "Now, I call that friendly meant, I do! And what does your mother say to it, I wonder?"

"She has not said anything. Why should she?"

"Ah, she will when she hears of it, you be bound! You see, we don't make out for to think ourselves your mother's ek'als, or yours either; we recognize condescension when we see it. Still, if you will be pleased to sit down, I am pleased for 'ee to do so."

Sabrina's colour was high. "I came to inquire how you were, Uncle James," she said, "but I need not stay unless you wish." Nevertheless, when David placed a seat for her she took it.

"Well," replied Lorry, "I be as you see me, no better and no worse. David, make up the fire!"

Then for a time speech ended, while the younger Lorry gave a vigorous stir to the logs upon the hearth. The room was already too warm. He turned from his operations to inquire of Sabrina if her chair were placed as she would like it. She recognized gratefully the kind amends made by his tone for the old man's rudeness, and answering, added—

"Do you use faggots here always? How brightly they burn!"

"*We* use faggots," said the farmer, sticking to his device of carping comparison. "Coals we keep for our parlour-boarders; they are only for the quality. Your mother ha'n't no complaint to make of 'em, I hope, young woman — lady I should say."

"Uncle James," petitioned the girl with grave earnestness, "will you, please, try to remember what my name is, and call me by it?"

"Well, I've heard of it; but 'tis a great awk'ard mouthful for plain folk to use: a real knock-me-down sort of a name, I call it."

"Sabra makes it quite easy."

"Za-a-bra!" drawled the old man, debasing the sound with slow relish. "Why, surely that puts one in mind of they striped donkeys you see in travellers' menageries. Now Zabby 'ud sound a deal better and more reasonable. I'll call 'ee Zabby

with pleasure since 'tis to oblige 'ee — or Briny, if ye like that better." Farmer Lorry accorded to the selected diminutives the lowest and most sordid rendering possible.

Sabrina gave in a faint assent to the proposed usage.

Forthwith the farmer assumed a more cordial tone: the situation entirely suited his queer humour.

"Come," said he, encouragingly, "now we shall be getting on. Zabby'll do first rate. The fact is," he continued, as though to explain past difficulties, "I can't abide gentry, and I don't like mixing wi' 'em. Your mother, she got mixed up with gentry and ended by marrying one of them. What's it brought her to? Poverty and Popery, I say. What made her, come of a good Protestant stock, turn Papist? Having a gentleman for a husband, I say. Did being a gentleman make him keep his lawful wife? Did it?"

David thumped the fire, breaking the billets into fractions.

"Now, boy, boy!" cried the farmer, "don't 'ee go wasting good fuel that way."

Sabrina declined the diversion. "Why are you saying these things now, uncle?" she inquired in even tones.

"Now? It's now that we are seeing the results of it all! Did it make him leave any provision for his family? Did it make him live decently, or die decently—being a gentleman, eh? I'm not for blaming *you*, Zabby," went on the unbearable old man; "it's not your fault you've got mixed up in it. But I'm just telling you what it is—a bad thing from the start. Don't you go trying to be a lady, Zabby; you'll only end as your mother has ended. Don't try it, I say!"

As though by this time he had earned some refreshment, he bade David draw him some ale.

"I must try to believe that you mean kindly in

saying these things," said his niece, with rising anger.

"I don't mean kindly, and I don't mean unkindly," answered the old curmudgeon. "I only mean facts; you've got to stomach 'em some day, so it's better to know 'em now."

"You tell me nothing that I am not aware of," said Sabrina. "I know everything already."

"Oh, you do, do you?" said the farmer, queerly. "You know that your father was a rogue, then?"

"I know that he did wrong things."

"Did he ever do a right one?"

"He is dead," said the girl, simply.

"Ay; and that was only half honest. Could he pay for his own coffin?"

Sabrina sat silent. But for her cousin David's sake she would now have gone, never to return; she was properly punished for having believed friendly terms possible.

The farmer said, after a pause to let his triumph sink in—

"Ah, if I'd only had the walloping of him when he was a boy. I don't turn out rogues, I don't, once I tackle 'em. That fellow over there now," he pointed to his son, "I had the making of him, he may thank his stars. Rogue was in him at one time, till I larrapped it out of him."

Farmer Lorry had a gross habit, arising from a vast sense of his own importance, of alluding to people in their presence as though they were absent or unconcerned: he was thus able to indulge his taste for backbiting in the very hearing of his victim. Protest was useless, while silence and submission were accepted as proof of the accusation. Under these attacks David had long since learned to sit unmoved: for passive endurance the meek housekeeper was his only possible rival. With Sabrina for audience and a certain recent recurrence to insubordination well in his mind, Farmer Lorry pursued his theme,

"Till I larrupped it out of him," he said, and pointed. "Do you see that stick?" At a corner of the ingle lay a stout ash sapling, showing age and wear. "There's the tool I turned him out with," continued the old man eloquent. "And you may say it was hard work; why, so it was. And you may say, did I ever get any thanks for 't? No, I didn't. But I've made my son what he ought to be, and he's no rogue; and maybe he'll thank his old father for it some day, though I may be in my grave then. Ay, you don't better the stick, I say; no other thrashing-machine ever come up to it. David, he looks at that and he remembers who it was once mastered him, and would still if 'twere needed. That's the truth, Zabby." He added for a finish, nodding across the hearth to where his son sat passively regarding the flames, "David there, he hears well enough what I tell 'ee; and he ha'n't got a word to say against it."

Sabrina's patience had reached its limits: she rose abruptly.

"I hope you will be better in the morning, uncle," she said, with cold civility, and passed out, giving but half a glance and a murmured good night to her cousin, who sat staring into the fire and making no sign. She was miserably conscious that her visit had been the occasion, if not the cause, of the indignity he had to endure.

After she was gone David still sat staring and saying no word. He took up mechanically the staff of discipline lying near him, eyed its written stem, and the ferule stumpy with long use. Extending it toward the fire, he began poking at the faggots; then, levering a log, he worked in the end, and there let it rest. Old Lorry, watching from his chair, cried peevishly—

"Now, boy, now, you are burning that ash stick!"

It was even so. A little tongue of flame lapped round the ferule; in the centre it showed blue

where the chemic action of heat on metal had begun.

David bent forward and stared into the fire, giving no sign, saying no word. He drove the stick a little further home, only a little further: inch by inch the fire crept along the wood.

Language not to be repeated came now from the farmer; his voice rose to a roar, wrath choked it, it broke into a whine wrung out by physical pain. The meek housekeeper came forward to learn what was the matter; the men at the far end of the room stood awkward spectators of the scene. Farmer Lorry sat impotent, gripped hard by his malady in the rear: knives cut into him whenever he attempted to move.

David sat as one studiously absorbed, pushing the stick to the flame. Presently six or eight inches were gone: the ferule dropped off, and lay a ghost of fire, blue amid the red embers.

The farmer now called for others to lend aid.

"Take it off him, take it off him!" he cried.

The housekeeper, a mechanical messenger of peace, whose instinct was to obey, went up to David and touched the lapel of his coat.

"Go and sit down, Mrs. Willings," said he; it was the only word he spoke through all that scene. Not a man came forward to lay hands upon him.

As one faithfully pursuing an experiment to its end, so David sat and watched impassively the burning of the rod which claimed to have made him a man. When the heat became too much for his hands he thrust all that remained of the stump into the fire and rose quietly, as though the matter had thus reached final solution.

Not a man spoke in all that room: Mrs. Willings, for some queer reason of her own, sat and snivelled into a corner of her apron. Spent with rage, catching painfully at breath, the farmer sat in his chair speechless, eyeing his son. He looked now as though he were expecting a blow. When the



hour struck and the farm labourers trooped off to their loft, David dismissed Mrs. Willings for the night and remained to lock up the house. Five minutes later he carried his father up to bed. The son was a man of few words, the father a man of many: yet a likeness between them showed now.

"Davy?" murmured the old man, in quavering tone, pitiful in its appeal: he said no more.

David answered him not a word.

## CHAPTER X

### FARMER LORRY LAYS DOWN THE REINS

A VIOLENT bell-ringing in the rafters, and the vigorous thumping of a boot upon the floor were the signals for all sleepers at Lorry's Farm to arise and work. In the older part of the house the bedrooms stood like boxes without lids under a common roof; thus a single bell held common jurisdiction over all sluggards, whether in the men's quarters to the right of the staircase, or in the women's to the left. The boot-blow was for the benefit of David, who slept in a room under his father's, out of hearing of the bell.

The vindictive blow seldom reached his ears, and never caught him at slumber, for he was by habit an early riser, and a short sleeper at all times. Maids descending to their morning work often found traces of a hastily snatched meal; and in a while, when the whole household was astir, David, the man of peace, would stroll in on them keen-eyed and ruddy after a two hours' break in the open, fresh, perhaps, from a spell of sea-fishing.

Sabrina, risen early herself one summer morning, had noted this alert aspect of a face that became more placable as the day wore on; it reminded her of the look of some benevolent bird of prey, and she admired it not a little. These draughts of the dawn he took always in solitude.

Whether Farmer Lorry knew of his son's independent risings or no, his appetite for a tyrannous

assertion of his authority made his hammerings at the floor as vigorous and prolonged as his ringing in the roof; punctual to the stroke he rained his blows aloft and below to convey the same imputation of wilful sluggishness against all. The farmer was one to whom smooth-tongued methods came neither by grace nor by nature; he would damn a man sooner than look at him, and regard as a rebel one who did not anticipate his bidding. Thus his mind was already on the rasp over the obstinate slumbers of his household, before ever he laid hand on bell-rope or boot-thong; and the "Devil take you!" of his summons, the "How dare you be asleep when *I* ring?" were recognizable by all.

It had come to be his custom in old age, having set the machinery of his house thus in motion, soothed by a consciousness of the due disturbance of others, to turn over again on his bed for a last sleep. But on the morning following the events last recorded, Farmer Lorry, having given the customary knocks, bided a while, and knocked again.

"Davy, Davy!" he cried, pitching his note of complaint so as to be heard in the room below.

David did not come.

Leaning down over the bedside he called again, but fetched no answer. After a further wait, moaning and whining to himself, he rose, and shambled across the room to a spot near the wall, where a large gap in the unceiled timbers let in light from the chamber beneath. From this coign of vantage in old days the father had once, for discipline, poured down a jug of ice-cold water on a sleeping form below; and in the darkness had heard the steeled youth start up without a cry. That had come on the top of a rare thrashing, and in the morning David had disappeared — not to be seen again for four years. The old man had a dim perception that those four years' loss of discipline would

never be made good: the lad had come back a changed being, easy-going, yet in some queer way aloof, self-possessed, no man's property but his own. Hidden away in a sour nature, the farmer had a devouring pride in his son; but he was miserly and covetous of soul; what he loved he must also possess, and his right seemed now to be denied him. Bullying fondness had led to his telling Sabrina of the youth's up-bringing under wise chastisement, and little could he understand David's wrath over the recital, if it were not the old fought-out devil cropping up in him once more. Had he been hale, the farmer told himself, he would yet again have applied the old remedy, just to be sure that the lad was still his very own. Now feeble and infirm he must reach his end by other means.

Still bemoaning his aches and pains, he got down upon his knees, and put his mouth to the chink. In a voice of quavering self-pity —

"Davy!" he cried. "Davy! why do ye not come up when I call to ye? Ye ain't angry with your old father, are ye? What have I done to ye, Davy, lad; what have I done, 'cept it was for your own good?" He paused, then again went on. "Ay, I've been a good father to ye always; don't you forget that, my son, now that I'm growing old, and need a prop to my declining years. Ah, it's a false son that deserts his old father. David, eh, David, lad?"

With the sad recital of his own virtues and unrequited love, his sense of injury grew. He paused; still there was no answer. Withdrawing his mouth, the farmer placed an eye to the aperture, and saw beneath him a bed that had not been lain on, and the room empty.

The sight gave bitter offence; all this time he had been wasting his heart on emptiness, pouring out his soul to no purpose. He felt that he had been made a fool of, and suddenly the conviction

came on him like physical nakedness that he was a very lonely and neglected old man.

He looked down again on the unoccupied bed, twisting its meaning to his own choice.

"Chambering and wantonness," he muttered. "Ay, that's what it is; chambering and wantonness!" He repeated the accusation with that keen sense of moral support which the wicked always derive from the citation of Scripture. Then he shuffled feebly back to the warm bed he had quitted, and, comforting himself with the thought, "Me, a poor bed-ridden old man!" got into it, and allowed sleep once more to steal over him.

Three hours later Farmer Lorry was still abed, and word was about that he meant to stay there. David first heard of it as he was going out upon his rounds; he heard of it to more effect, returning late at the dinner hour to find the men clamouring for their midday beer.

The case was stated by the housekeeper; Mr. Lorry was abed, and an hour before had sent word that he was about to sleep, and was not to be disturbed; on the other hand, here was honest labour waiting for its beer, and of a truth beer was in the bargain with wages. The key to the situation lay in the pocket of the farmer's breeches beside his bed; what was to be done?

David trod the stair to his father's room. Old Lorry heard him coming, not softly, as one fearing to disturb a sick man's midday snooze. He whipped out a hand for his keys, and got them safe; a momentary panic when David's touch fell on the door made his brain agile; he snatched them from under his pillow, and thrust them down to the far end of the bed. During the interview that followed he held them clasped in his toes, a delight to his sense of possession. Master of the situation, he let it be known that the men might wait for their beer till he was up again, reckoning David, by the light of certain episodes of a riotous youth, as one

not to be trusted. His son went no further than to hold up two articles of apparel, and shake them with an ear to sound: short of speech he came, and short of speech went. The farmer waited till the door was shut; down among the bed-clothes he jiggled the keys delightedly, and between the four posts of his bed indulged his sense of triumph. But there his dominion ended; before they rose up from table the men had their beer, and the cellar a broken padlock. The son went up, and told his father what he had done.

“David, the devil’s in you again!” said the old man.

Something certainly was, making short work of the old conditions under which he had so long laboured without voice or authority.

What passed between him and his father that afternoon no man knew; but in the evening old Lorry dressed, and came down. There was some ceremony in his appearance. Mrs. Willings came first, carrying cushions for his chair and a footstool. Then very feebly the farmer entered, leaning on two sticks, his progress a slow shuffle with many pausings and wincings by the way, a picture of bodily infirmity meekly borne.

He got to his chair amid a general silence. The men at their own end of the room sat looking on. David, contrary to his custom, was not among them; from the ingle-corner he turned about on his father’s entry, but made no further sign of welcome. Mrs. Willings helped the old man into his seat, and settled the footstool for him. He sat looking down the room.

“Go and bid the men come up nearer,” he said then, speaking feebly. “I’ve got to make ’em hear me somehow.” He was audible enough before he reached the end of his say.

The men rambled forward awkwardly, and stood about the partition which divided the room into two chambers. The farmer eyed them over, as a drill-

sergeant his squad, let them wait awhile; then, casting an eye round to the rear, where his son sat arms folded regarding no one, he set himself weightily to his task.

"Men," said he, "listen, every one of you, to what I have to say. Here you see me an old man sitting feeble and afflicted; and yonder you see a young one, strong, and in the pride of life — that's my son, what I made him. Well, you know me, and you know him. You know how I've sweated and toiled and moiled year in year out on this farm, so as to leave it to him as good as I found it when my time comes to go. You know that, men, don't you?"

"Ay, we know that well enough," said one, acting as spokesman for the rest. "Yes, we do know it, Mr. Lorry."

"Well, then, you know me," went on the old man, scoring his points; "that's been my life, and my aim; and now I'm come to the end of it all."

"Don't say that, Mr. Lorry," protested another of the group, as the farmer again paused.

"And now," he resumed, "here's my son David come to take my place — seems he's been waiting for it these three years, and has got tired of waiting at last. I'm too tough for'n; he goes when he likes, and he comes when he likes — leaves me to do all the work alone, and then comes back hoping, maybe, to find me dead, and my shoes warm for him to step into. 'Stead of that he finds me alive, with as good a head for farming as ever, but sore afflicted in body and limb. Well, what does he do then?"

"Why, surely he's been a shoulder of strength to 'ee, Mr. Lorry," replied one, more ready to plead David's cause than the rest.

"Ay, a shoulder; so he has," returned the farmer. "Young and strong he comes back, and finds me old and feeble, an easy enough mark for him to aim at. So, with his shoulder of strength he comes to

help me, as you say—and down I go! Well, men, these be our sons nowadays; and as we made 'em, we got to let 'em be our masters at last. Anyway, I've found that true; and being too feeble to do else, I don't say but what it's right. So that's all said and done, and you know who your master is now: a fine one to look at, I say, for I made him, though all he uses his strength for is to put an old man to shame. Well, bed's the place for me now; I shan't be in any one's way there, and if the farm's got to suffer, why, so it must. My day's over."

He got up from his chair as he spoke, looked round on his son to measure the effect of his words in the direction where they had been most aimed, but got neither look nor word in exchange. Then, with the same feebleness with which he had entered, he tottered off to bed, and lay there for a month. A doctor was called in; nothing was the matter with him but his old aches and pains, but it satisfied his sense of importance to set heavy charges for medical attendance against the profits of the new management, since it was David who had caused him to become bed-ridden. Thus, with a pension to his injured feelings, old Lorry retired from work, wishing all the harm in the world to the business he had quitted.



## CHAPTER XI

### AN ARRIVAL AND A DEPARTURE

SABRINA saw a boyish face looking at her with interest across the hedge as she passed up the Castle lane. The youth was accompanied by dogs and a keeper, and carried a gun. She met him rather often during the rest of the day; or, to state the case more accurately, he met her. This was Ronald Lutworth.

She had been at her new duties for a couple of days, and was finding that, at the outset, her work would be more a matter of dusting and clearance than of cataloguing. Behind a veneer of decorum lay chaos. Whatever book had been in use had become misplaced, only the great monumental works of history and science, which nobody thought of consulting, remained as her father had left them. She came on his manuscript notes preparatory to a printed catalogue; but the scheme had not been carried far: if it was to be completed, there was at least a year's work before her.

In the dark and gloomy suite of chambers which composed the library, her spirits rose; here, at last, was something definite to tax brain and energy. Lady Berrers paid her a visit, and, finding so much dust and disorder, sent a servant to her aid. This turned out to be Lottie Gage. The hours passed happily; Sabrina, listening to the girl's chatter, found that she had secured the company of a sort of human canary, preferable to the kind she had to endure in her own home. This

one she could at will either silence or send away, and, having the means of relief at her command, she grew rather to welcome the distraction.

Lottie was a bird: that was the girl's character. Her griefs were birdlike, thin, piping, and full of complaint; her happiness was song; her heart had its nest, too, and flew there on wings at the least excuse. Talkative or silent, Sabrina soon came to know from the girl's face whether her thoughts were in their true nesting-place; when they were there her whole being seemed lifted to keep them company: "lifted" was the true word. Love, then, thought she, viewing this object-lesson, finds its true payment at home independent of the recipient; for she could not believe sufficiently in the common British workman to imagine that Lottie's ideal had better than dull material to go upon.

Just now the girl had a fresh grievance; she had not seen her stonemason for more than a week. Once she had missed him, and he had been unable to come since. Extra work was keeping him late; he could not get away till after dark; Lottie's chance of meeting him except on Sundays had thus become small.

"And oh, it's like that!" she cried, pressing her heart to indicate the ache and longing that possessed her. But when later that day she came to Sabrina all tearful for comfort, her concealment of certain facts grew evident.

"Look at me!" she cried. "I've made a fright of myself! Oh, what shall I do?" An accident with an oil-lamp, while descending to the cellar too heavily laden, had resulted in a burnt hand and the singeing of the light waves of hair that fluttered over her temples. "That settles it," she wailed. "Now I can't see him! Oh, whatever will he think of me?"

"When were you to see him?" asked Sabrina.

The girl blushed; convicted, she confessed frankly.

"To-night. He was going to be in the park to meet me; I could have just managed to slip out between eight and nine."

"That is too late for you," said Sabrina, looking grave.

"Oh yes, I know; and now I'm punished!" replied the girl. "But it was just a chance — my only one!"

"I think, in any case, you ought not to go."

"I can't now. Oh dear," wailed the love-lorn maid; "and he'll come and wait, and that'll make him so angry, for he's sure to think it's because he kept me waiting last time!"

"Can't you write to him?"

"Yes, I must. Oh dear, but I can't now." She held up her bandaged hand. "And how'm I to get it to him?"

Then, with more blushes, seeing no other way, Lottie confessed that there was a meeting-place, and a stone under which letters lay and were exchanged; and if her dear Miss Sabrina would be so good and kind, she might help to prevent a misunderstanding.

This was to have a closer hand in the affair than Sabrina cared about. On reflection, however, she consented to carry the note, if Lottie would promise that there should be no more such meetings.

"Oh yes," said the maid forlornly; "I must do whatever you tell me, miss, since you've got to do the writing. Only don't make me say it in any unkind sort of way!" she added pleadingly. Her submissiveness was touching.

Sabrina wrote at her dictation, learning then for the first time that Freddie was the name of the adored one. The letter showed a dangerous softness.

"You make yourself too cheap, Lottie," was her comment on finishing. "If you do that, how will you teach him to respect you?"

"I don't care about his respecting me, as long

as he loves me!" said Lottie, as she mumbled kisses on to the crosses which Sabrina had set down at her bidding. "Only three! Oh, what will he think?" she exclaimed, regarding them ruefully. She begged for a more lavish demonstration to be made.

"Lottie," said her companion, "you make me anxious."

"I am anxious myself!" said the girl, naively assuming that their minds had thus found an agreement on the matter.

Sabrina, on leaving the Castle for the second time that day, took the path to which the other directed her, found the stone at the trysting-place, and deposited the missive.

"Am I right?" she wondered, and hesitated; but it was too late then.

Halfway down the lane she came on David enclosing his sheep for the night. A muffled echo of recent events had reached her; coming from Mrs. Willings through Betty the version gave an unfavourable view of David's conduct. His stern unbending silence and rocklike attitude had appeared to bear out the charge of unfilial behaviour.

Sabrina, while not crediting the story in all its details, understood that a conflict of two wills had taken place, and that the old man had gone under, with the apparent result that a doctor had been sent for to attend on him.

Though with no wish to pry into the family differences, she could not, therefore, well avoid making inquiry. David's reply was that his father had nothing especially the matter with him. He added, leaning on the gate which he had just fastened —

"I ask your pardon, Cousin Sabra, for letting you come in the other night."

"Do not do that, David," said she; "or it will mean that I must ask yours — as I do, if it was

through me — that is to say, if my coming has been the cause of any later unpleasantness."

"Oh no," he said; "you are not to think that."

A silence ensued. Wishing to express a sympathy for which words were difficult, Sabrina lingered beside him, and, as she leaned at the gate, her hands pulled nervously at the loose knot of blue ribbon worn at her throat.

Thus they stood silently together, looking over toward the farm. There by the out-buildings and stable-yard could be seen the leisurely movements of farm labourers at their work; a boy came, leading a waggon team; two men were hoisting tarpaulins over an unthatched stack; from another quarter the slam and reverberation of heavy beams signalled the shutting of barn-doors; the lowing of cattle sounded from the milking-shed.

As Sabrina listened and watched, a sense of the peacefulness of it all came over her; she almost wished that she could make such a place with its quiet interests the home of her heart. From this outlook she turned to regard the man who was its directing spirit. Expecting to find a reflection in his face of the same quiet, she was startled to note the almost fierce intentness of his gaze: whether it were sorrow, or indignation, or mere concentrated thought, she could not tell.

Laying a friendly hand upon his arm, "David," she said, "what are you thinking of?"

His answer was unexpected. "I'm thinking," said he, "how we only find the truth of God's laws when they come hard on a man. The more they are worth, the harder they are to keep."

"You mean —" she said, and waited to let him speak.

He nodded towards the farm, indicating the direction of his thoughts.

"I'm master over there now," said he. "Yes; and though I could swear I'd done right, it seems

now as if I'd been all wrong. It's like cutting into flesh and blood when some things have to be done. But, there! it's no use speaking of it now!"

Sabrina said, "I know too little about it to say anything: and I hardly wish to know more; yet that you take it so much to heart makes it easier to believe that you were right."

The young man turned to her, watching, as one in a dream, the play of her fingers on the pinned ribbon at her throat.

"Well, it'll be all one to-morrow," he said at last. "It's thinking that wears folk out: and there's less danger in keeping one's mind than in changing it."

"But do you never change yours, David? There are times when one must go back."

"Ay," he answered, "one's dearly tempted to sometimes."

She gathered from his tone that their thoughts were apart: she could not fathom him. When she drew away from the gate to resume her course he did not offer her his company. With a secret sense of disappointment she walked on toward the farm alone.

Once again a figure that had already grown familiar came into view. Ronald Lutworth seemed to be everywhere. Twice on her way up to the Castle, and now, for the second time on her return, this face of silly sweet youth had persistently confronted her. The meaning it sought to convey was plain; mutely it said, "I adore you; but my silence shows my respect!" Thus loaded with eloquence, it passed honourably on its way. The youth was now without dog or gun—also without keeper; instead of firearm he bore in his hands a monstrous posy of late autumn wild-flowers delicately arranged.

Again he gazed upon the fair face of his day's passion, and passed it by, seeming this time to say,

“Look what a lovely bouquet I have brought for you, but am too full of respect to offer.” He was walking hatless, as though only so was it possible for him to pass the presence; his fair hair tumbled over a berry-brown visage with large grey eyes comically languishing: it was the face of some soft woodland creature from which a human soul looked out spell-bound. And if the eyes said, “Pity me!” they also said, “Admire!”—nor could admiration be denied to that combination of a natural and an artful attractiveness. This head of scatter-brained romance was perched on the lean body of a bred athlete. Nothing of its wear, from the open throat of the shirt to the curiously thonged shoes, was quite the same as other men’s.

Fifty years before, this youth would have fallen into the Byronic convention. He was but wearing another cut of the same cloth; indulging, in fact, in that seed-time of the ideas and the emotions which seizes for a brief period many destined to an after-life of strict social conformity.

One curious point of personal resemblance struck Sabrina on this their fourth meeting. Seeing him from a distance, she noticed that his walk was like David’s, a measured gait of long, slow strides, easy and negligent, almost a slouch.

As he and the breath of his bouquet passed, the awkward consciousness of these repeated meetings caused Sabrina’s colour to rise; yet she could only laugh outright at the absurdity of the thing when, coming to the entrance-gate of the farm, she saw laid there, like an offering at a shrine, the same bouquet which Ronald Lutworth had been too respectful to present when passing. She let it lie, and had afterwards to hear many reproaches and complaints over that first act of cruelty.

A few minutes later, standing before her glass, she found her brooch hanging; the blue ribbon it had held was gone. She supposed it must have fallen somewhere between the field-gate and the

farm; and, if that were so, could guess into what foolish hands it had probably fallen.

A day or two later, Ronald Lutworth found his way to the library in sudden need of a guide to English literature. The place was evidently unfamiliar to him; he roved over the shelves of history in search of the works of Charles Dickens. Inquiring of Miss Warham whether she had ever read that author, and hearing that she had, he seemed to consider that a strong intellectual bond had been established between them, seeing that he himself was now about to begin.

"Did something the other day—died, didn't he?" he inquired solemnly, enabling Sabrina to guess how it was that he had Dickens sufficiently on the brain to name him.

Before long she was in difficulty how to get rid of him. As there was dusting going on, he insisted on doing it. Lady Berrers, who looked in daily, came and caught him in the act, quickening Sabrina's sense of annoyance over a situation she had been unable to prevent.

"Is that boy worrying you?" the lady asked sensibly.

"I am helping," said Ronald.

She gave him an understanding look, and packed him out of the room.

"Make what regulations here you like," she said, when her nephew had gone; "and I will see the family observes them." She added in a much more concerned tone, "Can you tell me what has become of Lottie?"

"I met her just after I left last evening," said Sabrina. "I understood then that she had leave of absence. Perhaps if you were to ask the housekeeper——"

"But the housekeeper has asked *me*."

"Oh!" cried Sabrina, starting, "then I ought to have known: now I remember! Oh, madam, how I reproach myself!"



"With what?"

"That I did not guess. She asked me to kiss her; and I saw that she had been crying. I fear now that it meant good-bye."

"Yes; but even then? It may be serious enough; but what have you to reproach yourself with?"

"She was wearing a hat that I thought I had seen once before; and now I remember; it was at an inn window in Warringford."

She recounted the circumstance.

"I ought to have been more alive," she said; "for I knew she had a friend — a lover — not the one you spoke to me of; but, by her own account, a very respectable man."

Lady Berrers was deeply concerned. "Poor Lottie!" she said. "I fear her word counts but little. I had a presentiment that she was too pretty for her station; no, for her brains, I mean! I will send over to Warringford at once. There is just a chance."

"She may really have gone to get married!" said Sabrina, with faint hope.

"And she may find she has been deceived," replied Lady Berrers. "In such a case, I fear she would not have the courage to return."

Sabrina recognized the likelihood of this supposition.

"Oh, I will go at once!" she said. "Let me! It is better for it to be some one she knows and can trust."

"Yes; go, go!" cried the lady, urgently. "Oh, what a trouble in this world good looks are! I am sometimes tempted to wish that we all had scratched faces till we reached forty and discretion. No; I don't mean people like you, my dear!" Then, approaching kind lips, "May I?" she inquired, and kissed her.

Inquiry of Mrs. Gage sent Sabrina over to Warringford post-haste. Search went out in other directions also; but no Lottie was traced.

The same evening Tam George, the carrier, brought word of her. She had travelled in his cart that morning, meeting him on the road, and had been set down at the Blue Bear. It was the last news heard of Lottie Gage in East Gill for many a long day.

## CHAPTER XII

### MOTH AND RUST

DURING the first fortnight of her librarianship, except for Ronald's occasional inroads and the friendly visits of Lady Berrers, Sabrina was left entirely to her own devices. Under her management, the books had already been brought into fair order, pending her scheme for making out a complete catalogue. Little by little she was acquiring full knowledge of the material she would have to deal with.

The last of the three rooms under her jurisdiction had been arranged as a small museum. It contained some Roman pottery and coins, a few instruments of war, ornaments, and articles of apparel from the South Sea Islands, and a more important and homogeneous collection of minerals and fossils, chiefly of local origin. These she regarded as outside her province, though they were actually in her custody. Here, stuffed among some shelves, she came in one of her clearings on a dozen booklike cases containing a damaged collection of butterflies. She spoke of them to Lady Berrers.

"They belonged to Ronald's father," replied her friend. "I suppose they have now very little value, but I will ask the Squire what is to be done with them."

A few days later, Sabrina sat busy in the middle library amid apparent rubbish heaps, when she heard a soft shuffling step near her. Turning, she saw Squire Lutworth for the first time; a tall, thin

old man of precise appearance. He stood with his back to her, reaching for a volume in one of the upper book-shelves. Having secured it, he made a great to-do, clapping and blowing on the covers as though much dust had settled there; all the while he talked to himself, appearing unconscious that the room held another occupant.

"Will you allow me, sir?" said Sabrina, coming forward to offer assistance.

The old gentleman turned sharply about, viewing her up and down over the barrier of the big volume which he had now opened.

"Oh, you are Miss Warham, are you?" he said; then throwing a cold glance about the room, "You appear to have made great disorder here. Yes, I was saying to myself when I came in, this room shows great disorder. You are new to this sort of work, no doubt."

"The disorder *was* here," answered Sabrina. "I am only bringing it to light, preparatory to abolishing it."

"Ah, yes! Well, it looks very untidy, I must say, and very useless, all of it; much better be burned, I fancy, this sort of stuff; smells most unpleasantly, unwholesome, even; almost needs a sanitary inspector. Whatever you do don't introduce infection."

Sabrina smiled. "Things were very damp here," she said; "that accounts for the smell. May I order some fires to be lighted?"

"Fires? Oh yes, yes, I suppose so, if you must. Don't burn the place down. If you wanted a bonfire, I should have supposed it would be better to have it out of doors."

"But I don't want a bonfire at all," she answered. "Please don't think of having anything burned yet. Why, some of the most valuable things in the whole library may be here, huddled out of sight and forgotten."

"Ah, that is your opinion! Young people, of

course, have those notions — romantic discoveries, and such stuff. Yes, you remind me; you are very like your mother who was once here. She used to be romantic, too, in her young days; very troublesome, very catching. I am told you live with her; I trust she is recovering."

"Entire recovery we can hardly hope for her now."

"No? Well, well, recovering is more trouble than falling ill sometimes." He walked up the room and showed that he expected to be followed by remarking presently, as though she were still at his elbow, "Well, now you are here, I suppose you require supervision."

Sabrina referred to the museum.

"Yes, yes, come with me, and I will supervise you," he said, and led the way in.

She soon learned that, as regards books or natural history, he was without ideas of any kind; the only one which he managed definitely to convey was that the place belonged to him, that under his orders it might be improved, but that without his orders he would very much rather it went to rack and ruin. Sabrina had been in possession a fortnight, and had begun to feel a happy sense of responsibility over the ordering of things: a ten minutes' interview with Squire Lutworth was sufficient to remind her that she was merely a paid subordinate to a man with no policy or thought-out scheme beyond the satisfaction of his own self-importance for the moment. Most of her suggestions he first met with a decisive negative; two minutes later they became orders, given on his own initiative. His fidgety, jerky mode of speech was not the result of nervousness; he was simply a man slow in idea and vocabulary, bent on laying down the law. Conscious in some vague way of his inferiority of mind, he adjusted the balance by teaching others to remember their inferiority of station. Once in receipt of the deference which he

conceived to be his due, he was not unmannerly, could even be gracious; and the small acerbities which had shown in his first interview with Sabrina came merely in the hurry of acquainting a stranger with his claims. In appearance he was not without state, but his breeding was of the type that runs rather to backbone than to feature; as he walked he had a way of holding himself as though on horseback; perhaps a hobby-horse would have been the most fitting accoutrement of the inner man, slow-going, pompous, something of a masquerader. Having taken up much time and done nothing —

“Yes, I must supervise you,” he said, as he walked out.

Not a difficult man to read, nor perhaps to manage, thought Sabrina, after having studied him for a while; and her philosophy was sufficient to leave her amused rather than annoyed at the ineffective interference with which her work was threatened. One thing she gathered plainly; that a dispersal of the collection, both library and museum, was impending. “I think of presenting it to the nation,” said the Squire, with a flourish; but Sabrina had learned more than he had intended to convey, and understood well enough that if ever the presentation took place, some equivalent in title would be demanded.

Meanwhile, another member of the family was endeavouring to prove his importance to her, on different lines. Ronald obeyed his aunt’s interdiction of the library as long as it suited him to exhibit the languishing demeanour of a hopeless exile in other places where Sabrina was sure to be met with. They encountered at least twice daily; seeing him often in David’s company, she might have imagined it was sought as a means to an end, had she not learned from Lady Berrers that a fast friendship existed between them. The great lady seemed almost to share it.

“Have you found out what a fine fellow your

cousin is?" she asked early in their acquaintance, and more than once the inquiry was repeated.

Sabrina's admission, "I like him," did not satisfy her.

"You should get to know him," she persisted; "he is worth it."

"I believe in his worth thoroughly, for I have seen it tested," replied Sabrina.

Lady Berrers gave her a soft look of scrutiny, but let the remark pass unexplained.

"I regard my nephew's liking for him as of happy omen," she said. "He is a man of sense; and to that Ronald has not yet attained. I am pleased for them to be together."

Sabrina, too, though for other reasons, would have liked always to see that youth in David's company. Alone she found it difficult to get quit of him; traces of his state of mind lay everywhere. Without putting his absurdity into words, he was beginning to lay strenuous siege to her favour. When the performance had gone on for a few days, Lady Berrers referred to it with her accustomed frankness.

"Ronny is in love with you," she said. "I trust you have a sense of humour."

"If I have, I wish I could lend it," replied the girl; "it is certainly what he wants."

"Not as a rule; no one laughs better than he does."

"Then I wish he would laugh quickly, so as to get cured."

"Ah, he has been teaching you that he can be solemn?"

"Yes; and then he becomes so laughable, I almost have to laugh."

"Oh, as much as you like! It is far more your solemnity that I am afraid of. I fear you are conscientious, and apt to take things too seriously. Now remember, conscience where Ronald is concerned is virtue wasted; it will only inflame him."

This, then, according to the person who knew him best, was the youth Sabrina had to deal with. His flowers continued to fall on her from unexpected places; he larded sweetness over the library in her absence; pressed blossoms fell from the books as she handled them; and the lover, studious to claim no credit by word written or spoken, watched with fond eyes to see it accorded him in her understanding. Ronald Lutworth in a short life had paid much court to beauty; but the death-blow of an acceptance had never fallen to him; it was part of his method to urge his suit with every appearance of hopelessness as to the result, his love being essentially that "of the moth for the star, the night for the morrow"; in a word his desire was toward the unattainable. Instinct had told him at first sight that Sabrina Warham would satisfy his need for some one to despair over.

One morning he stood before her table with a returned volume of Dickens.

"Miss Warham," he said, "I love you!"

She thanked him, taking the book.

"Oh, don't thank me for it!" he cried, all woe-begone.

"Let us put it in its place at once," she said.

"Are you talking of the book or of me?"

"Of the book, surely; you thanked me for introducing you to it. So you like Dickens?"

"I haven't read a word of him! I—I have been writing."

"That is better still."

"Miss Warham, will you—will you read what I've written?"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

He revealed a manuscript of no great bulk.

"Ah, poetry?" she said, perceiving its nature.

"If I read it, shall I be allowed to suggest corrections?"

He spied a trap. "I won't promise to change anything," he said.



"Is it so unalterable?"

"Yes!" He made his affirmative sound the vow of an everlasting passion.

"You mean, then, that it is perfect? You should publish it and get fame."

"Won't you read it?" he petitioned.

She took her time, saying at the end—

"And who is she?"

Forbidden to pretend ignorance, she declared "task" and "clasp" rhymes she could not possibly accept, and handed the sheets back to him. He offered to alter them.

"But that would be against your conscience."

"I haven't any; I only want to please you."

"Till you have one," she said, "that will be impossible."

Her handling of him was, as Lady Berrers had feared, too tenderly scrupulous to be of good effect. On this occasion she got rid of him without having to hear a second declaration of his passion. Yet, when left alone, she reproached herself for having, even in so small a degree, played with the youth's feelings. A curious lack of feminine skill in allurements and strategy marked her character; she was without zest for a game which inflicted an indignity on her idea of womanhood, being, in fact, as her friend had said of her, too conscientious.

"Ronny refuses to eat," remarked Lady Berrers on their next meeting. "What have you been doing to him?"

Sabrina took the jest seriously. "I am very sorry," she said; "I tried to laugh at him a little; I fear I did it too much."

"Oh, my dear, it won't hurt him!" was the confident reply; "he sleeps well, and that's proof positive. Indeed, I'm not sure that it wouldn't be good for him just for once to find his feelings seriously engaged. I wish you would do it for him!"

"Oh, please, no!" cried Sabrina. "I shouldn't like it at all!"

"Well, when are you going to marry, then? These things will go on, you know. Don't be too like your mother; she never would understand that she was beautiful: and she was, in consequence, the most dangerous woman of her day. I remember more than one would-be wooer who came to the Castle meaning to fall in love according to expectation, and whose affections strayed to the wrong person."

"Was not that your own choice, madam? You were not compelled to have my mother as your companion."

"Of course it was. She was an admirable lightning-conductor; we poor heiresses need them, if we would secure time to make choice of fit persons and lay hand suddenly in no man's. I was a happily married woman, thanks perhaps to your dear mother; and she will not understand the debt, nor can I now speak of it."

Allowed these glimpses of past history, Sabrina, though doubting the Squire's interpretation of her character, began to wonder whether her mother's youth had not held a romance. There was at least something romantic in Lady Berrers' loyalty when speaking of her, as though a debt were still waiting to be paid.

During the ensuing weeks, visitors were coming and going at the Castle; it was the season of game, and Ronald was obliged to take a part in entertaining his grandfather's guests; thus there were hours and even days which left him no opportunity for troubling her. Indication of his state, however, was not wanting when Lady Berrers, speaking of the date for her own and the Squire's departure, confessed uncertainty as to Ronald. "He still sleeps well," she said, in a tone which suggested this to be the only leg of sanity left to him.

Lady Berrers, full of worldly wisdom, still found amusement in the affair; but Sabrina's scruples rendered her uncomfortable; not that she could for

a moment regard the matter seriously; and for that very reason she was constantly called upon to play a part out of character with her own honesty of purpose. So when chance gave her the means to secure a respite, she made haste to use it. One day Ronald petitioned that she would lay a command on him, so that fulfilling it he might obtain her favour — anything, he did not care what, so long as it was difficult. Were she to do so, she asked, would he beforehand promise obedience?

"Yes, if it is not to cease —: the word I'm not to say," he answered. That word had been prohibited early in the career of his passion: "If it be true," had been her argument, "you have now told me, so I know. Tell me when it becomes untrue, and I will tell you if your recovery is news to me." Now she said, "I wish you to go up to town next week along with your aunt and the Squire, and, when they go abroad, go with them and do not return till they do."

He took the blow manfully, after his own fashion. In the interval Lady Berrers said, for the first time a little anxiously —

"He is not sleeping."

This was no news to Sabrina, seeing that she had already full knowledge outside what window he kept watch. For the first time keeping her own counsel, she said —

"He will sleep well when he gets to London."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the lady, nodding comprehension. "So at last you have used your power. Now you are dangerous!"

This was at their farewell meeting. As they embraced, the elder woman remarked —

"Ronald is in for a heartache — his twentieth attempt, his first success."

To give Sabrina comfort, she added that ~~she~~ do him a world of good. She was not one whom the future made anxious.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE PAINTED PARLOUR

WINTER descended grey and sudden over the downs in early December. The Castle party was already on its way through Town to the Riviera. East Gill shot its bolts on the outer world.

A blow more grievous than her loss of the befriending presence of Lady Berrers was dealt to Sabrina by the Squire at his departure. She was ordered to postpone further work on the library till his return in the spring made "personal supervision" possible. Should this arrangement keep her from other employment, her stipend, she was informed, would be continued to her—a small indignity characteristic of the Squire's method of conferring a favour. The affair was done ceremoniously by letter. Lady Berrers, writing a few days later from Town, had but just heard of it; her kind words showed that she understood how harsh was the stroke. "This is the sort of thing," she wrote, "that the Squire does by inspiration; and from pen on paper nothing will change him; he seems to regard his blotting-pad as a witness before the recording angel. I can get him to change his mind, but not his word; so for you, poor hungry piece of industry, I see no present remedy. Go up to the Castle when you like, borrow what books you please—so much, at least, I can offer you."

It was little in comparison with what she was deprived of, but the kind thought prompting it was not the less valued. She availed herself of the

privilege, and was emboldened to ask further that, as an apology for employment during the slow winter months, she might attempt the refitting of the damaged butterfly collection.

The permission was accorded. A new difficulty confronted her when the cases arrived at the farm; Mrs. Warham would not have them in the parlour. Her practical objection was fear of moth; a more reasonable one would have been the strong smell of camphor which filled the room whenever the boxes were opened. Sabrina felt convinced that the true reason had not been given, and wondered whether it were due to continued disapproval of her undertaking this kind of work, or, after all, to a sort of jealousy. Mrs. Warham had refused to allow more than one box to be opened. "Have them taken away," she said coldly, and caused the removal to be immediate by retiring to her room until it had been effected.

In this difficulty Sabrina consulted David, who offered her the use of a small parlour adjoining the common room.

It was barely furnished; unused except when farm accounts were made up on the weekly wage day. Recessed in the wall was a locked cupboard, covering the account books and the cash-box; there was nothing besides except a square of carpet over a tiled floor, a table and four chairs. As a workroom it suited Sabrina's purpose admirably. Having found from David that her use of it would cause no inconvenience she made a point of applying in form to her uncle for his permission.

He gave it as though he could not help himself; for his pose now was to creep decrepit in mind and will as in body, as though the weight of his son's despotism had brought him to earth never to rise the same man. Nevertheless, when David was afield old nature would have its fling, and he would give vent with unabated force to vitriolic abuse of the

work which went on round him. David's return to the house sent him back to his shell, with ten sad years added to his infirmity; dusk became his bedtime. This was his life—the nursing of a never-ending sour sense of his son's ingratitude. As his chief bitterness was against the farm's continued prosperity, so was his delight in mishaps to anything that moved on it. The chopping off of a man's finger in the chaff-cutter made for Lorry a red-letter day. One of the horses went lame: Lorry's legs went the lighter for it. A sheep slipped from the cliff above Amesbay, and was picked up carrion: the old farmer ate his mutton with the more relish. He leagued himself with the weather—like Samuel of old against the king-loving Israelites—and prophesied ill concerning it. And, as though indifferent to the paternal spite, David would still open his ear to the old man's advice, and, having sounded its worth, take it or leave it as he judged best. This sign of David's prevailing charity of mind was regarded by the elder Lorry as the blackest ingratitude of all. "You use me, and then you throw me away," said he, and it was an aspect of the truth; but aspect is not substance—they have the relation to each other of words to silence—and David, being a silent man, did not trouble to deprive the other of his luxury of complaint.

Sabrina, on entering into possession of her work-room, found comfortable additions. A chained lamp hung from the centre of the ceiling; to one of the chairs cushions had been added, and curtains to the windows. A dark, fusty-looking room by day, it now shone bright even to its corners, and, for the first time, she noticed that the wall-panels were adorned with curiously painted scenes, half scriptural, half historical. A glance sufficed to show that no master's hand had been responsible for the work; it was, in fact, frankly and irredeemably bad, but it was quaint and it was not English. A

further inspection told her it was not recent. She was puzzled, wondering what its history might be. But before long she had forgotten her surroundings, absorbed in the delicate manipulation of her work.

The first two cases she opened contained only British varieties; apparently in some stage of their history they had been subjected to rough handling; many had been detached from their cork stands, a few still hanging by a pin, but most of them lying altogether loose, divorced from their labels. Sabrina had not sufficient knowledge of entomology to restore them to their places, and it occurred to her then that she might have found the country more interesting had she looked at it with a keener desire to learn something of the life that went on round her. Probably many of these brilliant forms, so delicate in their beauty still, were natives of the neighbouring heath. Yet she knew nothing of them; for all that her eye told her, they might be foreign except for the distinctive label on each box.

Thus, at the very threshold of her self-imposed task, she found that she was too ignorant to proceed. No doubt the Castle library contained books that might help her, but meanwhile there was the room prepared and the fire lighted.

Determined to make it her study for that evening, she went upstairs and brought down the first books that came handy. After doing so it occurred to her that her cousin would surely know something of these native butterflies about which she was so ignorant.

One of the parlour-doors gave on to a small lobby, in which hung hats and coats, and this again through an opening with no door into the fireplace-recess of the common room. Using this passage of communication, Sabrina came on her cousin net-making.

"Oh, David, are you busy?" she asked him.

He took her question as a summons, and went with her into the little parlour.

"I am beginning to discover my ignorance," she said; "I wonder if you can help me?" She told him her difficulty, and found him fully up in the English and local names, but the labels were all in Latin; they could get no further. David thought that they were French; his saying so caused her to exclaim —

"What, do you not know French, David, after having been so much abroad?"

"Only a word or two that I picked up at the ports," he answered. "I never had much scholaring."

"Don't you miss it?" she asked.

"I don't know. Can a man miss what he has never had?"

"Yes; surely he can feel the want of something. And it is strange, now I come to think of it, that you should know no French at all, for we have French blood in us—you and I. My father once told me so."

The "you and I" came kindly from her lips. David stood looking at her with earnest eyes.

"I never heard tell of it," he said; "I reckon we are English enough."

"Oh no," she declared; "we are of Huguenot origin. Lorry is French badly spelt. You ought to know your own history, David! And talking of history, where do these come from?" She pointed to the pictures upon the walls.

"Ah now, that's curious; those are French," said her cousin. "Nothing to do with us, though."

"Is it known who did them?"

"Prisoners, so I've been told. French officers taken when Buonaparte landed."

"Buonaparte never did land, David."

"Oh, where did we beat him, then?"

"At Waterloo, finally."

"Well," he answered, "isn't that in England?"

Once again, as before, Sabrina felt a curious vexation at coming thus upon proof of her cousin's limited



outlook and training. He, such a good fellow, to know so little!

"Oh, David!" she cried, "did you waste your time very much when you were at school?"

"Yes," he replied simply; "not that I was there long, though."

"And so you know nothing about England, your own country? Don't you feel that is a loss?"

"Looking at it from your end, maybe that's true. Yes; I suppose it's reasonable to know how things have come about."

"You say it quite doubtfully. I wish you had more pride in you, David; more ambition."

"What should I have ambition for?"

"Have you no plans of what you would like to do and be?"

David looked at her as though slow to comprehend.

"I don't make plans," said he.

"None? Do you never look forward to anything?"

"No; to-day's enough for me. I take things as they come."

"But does that make you contented?" inquired his cousin, vexed at so passive a philosophy. "Have you never thought of what you mean to do with your life?"

"That's all been thought for me; I reckon I shall stop as I am."

"And you wish it? You can look forward to that prospect?"

"I don't wish otherwise. Where's the hardship?"

"To me it would be unendurable?" exclaimed Sabrina.

"Ay, to you; that's understandable. People are shaped so differently; none of us be quite of your pattern, Cousin Sabra."

David stated the fact dispassionately; the other

seemed rather inclined to take it as an accusation.

"You are quite mistaken about my pattern, as you call it," she replied with some impatience. "I am not superior to anybody; I only wish every one to follow the best that is in them. I hate to see ability wasted."

"My best," said David, and paused reflectively. "Well," he went on, "it's gone a different road now; I'm not likely ever to see it, I reckon. What's done is done. I wasted time once; there's no making up for that."

"You should not think so," said his cousin. "In a way that is never true; where one has the knowledge and the wish to do differently, one has really gained wisdom. I wonder," she went on, fighting her obstructive shyness, "I wonder if you would like, David, for me to lend you some of my books, or even for us to read together sometimes in the evening; that is when you have nothing better to do."

"I'm a poor reader," said David.

"Then I might read to you? I mean;—but no, of course, you have far too much to do, and when your work's over you are too tired for anything of that sort. I was foolish to think of it."

She was heartily regretting having spoken; her cousin's impassivity seemed a rejection of her shy, embarrassed advances. Great was her relief when David suddenly broke silence, saying heartily—

"Why, that would be fine! How I'm to thank you, I don't know."

"You can very easily," said Sabrina, all in a friendly glow at finding her proposal welcome.

"Can I?"

"Yes. Come now,—bring in your netting. You can work at it here, can't you. There is little I can do with these cases to-night."

A few minutes later David Lorry had gone to school for a second time, and Sabrina had once

more a pupil. She found him an attentive one, though silent. It was the first of many meetings.

When she rose to go, she looked round on the gaudily painted walls with a new sense of gratitude; their cheerfulness, their gay flaunting unconsciousness of their technical deficiencies seemed to suggest a philosophy worth cultivating—the triumph of self over surroundings. These paintings had lightened hours of captivity for men dwelling in a land hostile to their race, to their temperament; and they were the expression of something natural to the gallant French nation, something which has enabled its children, in spite of all reverses, to remain the play-makers of Europe, and to keep fair France the land of laughter.

While winter's wind roared over the downs and raked the bristling heath, and while, two miles away, even West Gill harbour became untenable to craft—a shaken backwater of storm, its rough-hewn jetty swept over by wreaths of foam,—while all the savagery of nature which she had dreaded spread desolation round her, Sabrina found in the cosy brightness of the small parlour, with its bad French art, a refuge for brief hours as welcome as unexpected.

Probably she did not estimate till long after the actual value those hours had for her, or how much she, who had undertaken the *rôle* of instructor, found instruction in a form of wisdom whose worth she had not hitherto distinguished, that, namely, which springs from character rather than from knowledge, and is communicated by no words which memory can recall.

During its unoccupied hours, two signs of the new use to which it was put remained in the painted parlour; Sabrina's books lay upon the mantelpiece; David's net hung from one of the beams. The remounting of the dead butterflies was relegated to the tedious leisure of daylight hours.

Lady Berrers wrote to Sabrina at the beginning

of the new year. "What are you doing with yourself?" was the main purport of many friendly inquiries; it was evident that she feared desolation to abound. She wrote from a land of flowers; her daughter as well as her nephew was with her. "Ronny sleeps," she wrote in a postscript, "but only since we left England. So you see . . .!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### A CHAPTER OF NATURAL HISTORY

THE touch of spring upon the senses is never so strong as at that short heralding period of the year before it gives vision to the eye. No note ever sounds more liquid with life than that of the early February birds singing in the thaws and the sunshine from the black dripping boughs of un-awakened woods.

That time of the year had come. East Gill was resuming its slow activities; farm workers were afield. At West Gill harbour fish could again be purchased, boats were unstacked from their inland shelters and once more ranged the beach.

This time of man's reawakening to labour and the joy of earth was marked in the Warham household by a small tragedy.

One morning, on going as usual to clean his cage, Sabrina found Buddhie fallen from the perch and lying dull-eyed and beak agape, a mere bunch of feathers amid the strewn sand and litter of his prison. For some days he had been ailing, and in the absence of his song Sabrina had found comfort; but this alarming development of what she had taken for a passing indisposition filled her with distress on her mother's account.

Informing Mrs. Warham, who was still in bed, of Buddhie's sudden seizure, she prepared at once to take the canary to Warringford and consult the bird-fancier from whom it had originally been purchased. It was Sunday, but the hour was early,

and she made no doubt of finding the man upon his premises.

Mrs. Warham, though full of tender solicitude on Buddhie's behalf, demurred, from the Sabbatarian instinct which still clung to her, to Sabrina letting herself be seen in the performance of a shop-door errand.

"But I am not missing my privileges," said the girl; "if I like I can go to church at Warringford." And without waiting for her mother's decision, she got ready to start.

Having constructed from cardboard an airy travelling-box with a row of small windows for the comfort of the invalid, she snatched a hasty meal and set out, disregarding Mrs. Warham's final entreaty that she would put on a loose mantle instead of a close jacket in order to conceal the fact that she went laden.

"Oh no!" she objected, "I should be far too warm; I mean to walk fast."

Several times while crossing the heath she peeped through the airholes of the box, anxious to know if her charge were yet alive. Now that he lay so still and stricken she felt a lively pity for her small tormentor; she carried him with all possible gentleness, even chirruping now and again for his encouragement, and to let him know that though incommoded and shaken, he was not deserted of friends.

"Oh, Buddhie, do be a sensible boy and live!" she cried, striving to employ the language of endearment which flowed so easily from her mother's tongue. The sick canary sat apparently holding his breath, maintaining a severely death-bed attitude which allowed her anxiety no respite.

The church bells were already chiming for morning service when she entered Warringford. Coming to the bird-fancier's door, she had to wait some time outside the shuttered shop-front before her knock won admission. While she so waited

several respectably dressed inhabitants, carrying prayer and hymn books, passed upon their road to church, accompanied by their families. Each of these groups gazed in turn with curiosity, suspicion, or disapproval upon the cardboard ambulance which, with its improvised air-holes, seemed a sort of a mixture between a doll's house and a Noah's ark, something at all events wholly out of keeping with the day and its penances. In the glances of these strangers she read the rebuke of her mother's eye. "I told you so; you should have worn your loose mantle, Sabrina!" was the judgment she seemed to hear passed on her.

After a few minutes' delay, in answer to her repeated knockings, an old woman admitted her to the darkened interior of the shop, and learning her errand, shuffled off to summon the bird-fancier from the bed where he was still enjoying his Sabbath rest.

Sabrina stood in a chamber of gloom, and as she waited discerned by degrees walls dimly patterned in irregular squares with a uniform wire-trellis extending over all. Within each of these squares went on a ticking noise, as persistent as, but not regular enough for, clockwork. The sounds came from the pickings and perchings of the innumerable occupants of the cages by which the bird-fancier made his trade. But though thus audible and in motion, they remained invisible, shadowed by the dividing partitions of their cells. After a time this continuous stepping from perch to perch gave Sabrina the impression that she stood in a sort of penal settlement, and heard all round her the prisoners treading out their useless tale of labour at the mills. But here anxious tip-toe impatience rather than dull grind seemed the incentive to movement.

One of the prisoners, when the momentarily opened door at her entry brought daylight from without, broke into eager chirrupings, drawing a

timid response from the inhabitants of other cells; but at the relapse of darkness the loud note of the impatient timekeeper died away, and the click, click, of claws from perch to perch went monotonously on, only broken now and again by the low querulous interrogation of some throat defrauded of its morning song.

Amid all this constrained activity Buddhie lay mute and resigned in the cardboard enclosure which might so soon become a coffin. Though her eyes were now grown accustomed to the gloom, Sabrina could not make sure by mere spying whether breath were still in him; lifting the lid she reached down a finger, and had just touched warmth when the bird-fancier entered the shop. Throwing back the shutter of a side window he let in a shaft of morning light, and with a mild apology for having kept her waiting, proceeded to examine into the condition of the sick bird.

The caged songsters around, beholding the light they had been waiting for, now broke into eager melody, the more boisterous because so long delayed. In the midst of all this uproar one throat alone lay still. The old shopman pursed his lips dubiously, turned the soft yellow plumage this way and that to note the condition of the skin underneath, pushed open the beak, and looked down the narrow red throat, all with that indifferent callousness of touch which the ignorant looker-on apprehends when watching the handling of an expert.

Presently he stopped his examination, and in answer to Sabrina's look of inquiry, shook his head decisively.

"There's nothing to be done," said he; "it hasn't a chance to live now."

"Nor if I had come sooner?" she inquired anxiously.

"Maybe a week ago," answered the other, "but there's no knowing; cage-birds don't hold out for



long when anything goes wrong with 'em. Do you wish me to do anything with it, now?"

"You mean that it would be better to make an end of it?"

"Well," the old man replied, considerately; "'twouldn't be worth your trouble, miss, to carry it back."

Sabrina gazed at the small object of their solicitude, and felt more tenderness for it now that its singing days were over. The gabble of the other birds went on: had Buddhie consciousness enough to recognize it he might have felt then in a measure like that royal toper whom history tells us of, tasting death in a cask of the liquor his soul loved best; but there was no sign that song meant anything to him now.

The bird-fancier, looking down on the ruffled comeliness of his once sleek person, said with professional forethought—

"Would you like to have him stuffed, miss?"

It was evident, then, that the end was not far off; indeed the inquiry, though it might have seemed untimely to a sentimental mind, anticipated only by a few minutes its justification in the event. Buddhie, lying out on the gnarled palm of the old bird-fancier, was taken with a short spasm; in a few seconds he had breathed his last, rejecting the troublesome burden of life. The bird-fancier said again—

"Would you like to have him stuffed, miss? He was a dainty one, he was; and a pretty show he'd make, to be sure, set up in a glass case; ay, a very pretty show!"

Thus he praised the dead.

Sabrina considered the gay coat, which the man was now smoothing into form to make the offer more tempting.

"I'm not sure," she replied doubtfully, at a loss to guess what her mother's wish would be. "I think, perhaps, it would be better if you let me

have another as like him as possible. My mother is an invalid and finds a sort of company in the noise. I don't like it myself; it gets on my nerves."

"In that case," said the old man, "a siskin might suit you better; it sings softer like. If you will step into that back room, I'll bring one out to you. Here you wouldn't be able to listen to 'un properly."

Following his direction Sabrina passed through a door and up a few steps into a small back workshop littered with the appliances of the fancier's trade, whose craft was not only concerned with the keeping of birds alive, but the preservation of them when dead. Several skins, peeled rinds of their former inhabitants, lay about on tables and shelves in the various stages of curing; a strong smell of camphor pervaded the room, while a glue-pot, some glass shades, twigs, lichen, and an assortment of pebbles, artificial grass, and leaves laid out on trays indicated other stages in the reconstruction of nature which here went on.

The room had already an occupant; in the low bay-window facing the door by which she entered, Sabrina saw a man's figure bending over the stuffed body of a large sea-bird into which he was just then inserting the guide wires necessary to preserve its deportment.

Hearing some one enter, the man looked round, when Sabrina at once saw that, though in a sense strangers, they were yet known to each other. The recognition was as instant on his side as on hers; with a face that showed surprise and animation he returned Sabrina's formal acknowledgment of his presence. Then, with the readiness of speech which she remembered from the former occasion, he began —

"This is fortunate indeed! Sabbath-breaking has its rewards; for a long time I have owed you thanks for the trouble you took on my behalf, and

have never known where to address them. Let me thank you now."

"Indeed," answered Sabrina, "so small a service is not worth mentioning."

"I measure it by my own selfish gain," he replied. "Thanks to you I recovered what was to me of value. See!" he went on, "here it lies on the table where I am now at work; it is my daily companion, and thus it constantly gathers fresh associations, many of them very pleasant ones."

His glance gave the words a meaning. Sabrina, recognizing on the pouch the silver initials "V" and "R" entwined, said, smiling —

"It looks as though it had been a royal gift."

"Ah, yes, to be sure, the initials do give it state; but they refer only to myself; Valentine Reddie is the name they stand for. This pouch was my first smoking companion, and I am so accustomed to it now that I hardly smoke happily without it."

"Surely that is a danger: losing it would almost make you regret the attachment."

"For a time, yes."

"You mean," said Sabrina, with a slight touch of irony, "until you had developed a similar fancy for a new one."

"Yes; but always with a memory for the old," he protested. "I believe women have no notion how faithful we men are to the humble odds-and-ends of things that have once served us. We are really most domesticated in our tastes, and become quite wedded to anything that —" he paused for a word.

"Adds to your comfort, you mean?"

He laughed ruefully, as one owning himself beaten.

"Well, I suppose I do mean that," he said. "I hear," he added, "that you have brought a sick bird to be doctored. I am not without knowledge in such matters, and shall be glad if I can give you any assistance."

"You are very kind," replied Sabrina, "but nature has chosen her own remedy; the bird died scarcely a minute ago. I am now considering the purchase of another."

"Ah, then, like myself you are a lover of birds. But are you able so speedily to fill the place in your affections? There is sense in it, no doubt; but some would consider you a little heartless."

"I am heartless enough not to care for pets at all," answered Sabrina; "but I have to put up with them for the sake of others."

Their conversation was here interrupted by the entry of the bird-fancier, bringing with him the siskin for approval. The old man whistled the bird into song.

"It is certainly more bearable," Sabrina said, after listening for a while. "Yes, out of a cage I could think it beautiful, which a canary's song never is. I only wish it were rather more like the other in appearance."

"Ah, but," said the bird-fancier, "if you've got the other one stuffed, the difference 'll be no concern to 'ee at all."

Sabrina was undecided, not knowing what her mother might wish. She arranged, therefore, to let the body remain and to send word next day what was to be done with it. The siskin she determined to take on approval; it would at all events do temporarily to fill the empty cage and give Mrs. Warham's ear the solace it needed.

The old shopman retired to pack the bird for travelling, and at Valentine Reddie's invitation, Sabrina turned to inspect the various specimens which hung round the walls. She saw at once that the bird-fancier's craft was one of the most conventional description; the attitudes of the stuffed birds were for the most part as stiff and un-reminiscent of life as they could well be, and the accessories of vegetation and foliage garish and overdone. Here and there a moth, butterfly, or

beetle had been added to the composition to give local colour and incident; but the situation was seldom well thought out. Pointing to a case in which hung a king-fisher pecking at a "white admiral," the young man said smiling—

"Natural history, I fear, is scarcely the old man's strong point; he does not recognize that it is part of the trade."

"Yet these are really good," said Sabrina, coming upon a group near the window.

"Ah, thank you, indeed! Those are my doing."

The girl at once became interested, for the specimens she was now looking at showed something of the artist's touch as well as the dexterity of the craftsman.

"Are you so much of a professional?" she asked in surprise.

"So much of an amateur, I would rather say," he responded. "This is my hobby, though I have also done commissions for profit; but by profession I am a geologist."

"Oh, a geologist? That means fossil-hunting, does it not?"

"That certainly forms a part, but it is not all, though it was what first brought me to this district. Last year I was sent down under Government to examine the strata exposed in the new harbour works at Wedport, and I shall expect to be there again when work is resumed in the spring. The whole coast is very interesting from a geological point of view. Just now I am here arranging the specimens I have already secured, and I find it convenient also for this alternative work, some of which goes presently to the British Museum."

"Why, that is almost like fame!" said Sabrina, impressed by the apparent indifference of the speaker to his attainments. "You must already have had a great deal of experience."

"Yes, I started young, and have travelled in rather outlandish places. I have been to unnamed islands in the Pacific, finding there more than one small variant which no one had met with before. Here, in this drawer, I have six specimens for which a rich collector has just offered me forty pounds each; unfortunately they are booked to the National collection for a much smaller sum. I have still to decide on a name for them; like our first father Adam, a discoverer is allowed that privilege."

"You must feel quite important."

"No, only very lucky in securing a berth which twenty men, all as good as I am, were trying to get hold of."

"And what do you intend calling them?"

"I had thought of '*Fringilla Reddiensis*' from a greedy wish to link my own name with the finding of them; but I am not sure that I shall not in the end choose some other and better one. How strange," he added suddenly, "that you should have come here to-day!"

"Not so very strange, when you know what my errand was."

"But that we should have met."

"Since we are in the same neighbourhood, it was not extraordinary."

"I look upon it as a friendly omen," declared Reddie. "Your finding of my pouch too!"

"Yes, I am glad to know that it reached your hands safely."

While she was speaking, the old bird-fancier returned with her new purchase conveniently packed for carrying.

Reddie started forward to take possession.

"Let me carry it for you," he exclaimed.

"Indeed, no!" she objected decidedly.

"Oh, but I must, I insist!"

Sabrina, having said no once, ruffled her fair brows at him.

The silent denial only stimulated his wish. "A part of the way!" he entreated.

"Not any, with my consent. I couldn't think of it."

Like a boy, he made an exaggerated show of disappointment, saying —

"Why are you so resolute?"

"Because," answered Sabrina, smiling, "I am obstinate to have my own way when it is mine by right."

"Then you force me to go on breaking the Sabbath!" he said, and allowed her to depart without further protest.

In the street her first solitary thought, in contradiction to what she had said but a few minutes ago, was — "How strange that we should have met again." For there was more accident about this second meeting than about the previous one. On the way home her mind was much occupied, less by the personality of this new acquaintance, than by his mode of life, with its varied interest of travel and science, and general freedom from routine, combining, as it did, the physical and the intellectual energies, the brain-work of the student and the exercise of manual labour. Had she been a man, Sabrina could have wished for no more congenial occupation; it seemed a reward in itself; and how much happier, she thought, appeared the instinct of the collector, as intelligently presented by the small littered workroom she had just quitted, than in the gloomy entombment of the Lutworth museum and library; between the acquisition and the conservation of knowledge there was, to her mind, restless under its present limitations, no possible comparison. This wish to be up and moving she inherited from her father, and continual residence with her other parent had only made it grow stronger.

Occupied over the ideas suggested to her by

this new outlook, she paid little heed to the lively bobbings of her small companion, so different from the mute endurance with which its predecessor had gone through the same ordeal. But as she neared East Gill, a doubt arose whether she had not acted precipitately in thus bringing a strange bird so immediately to replace the one whose death she would have to announce when introducing the stranger.

So much did the doubt increase that, on entering the house, she was about to put the siskin in a place of concealment until she could be assured of its welcome, when Mrs. Warham, anxious for news of her pet, came into the passage and found her, cage in hand. Seeing brisk movement within, she uttered a gay cry of relief, and ran forward to lavish praise on her darling for its recovery.

"My Buddhie boy!" she cried.

"No, it's not Buddhie," said Sabrina, all her guilt then for the first time coming home to her. She saw her mother's face wither at the words, and speaking rapidly to forestall useless interrogation, she recounted Buddhie's survival of the road into Warringford, his peaceful death in the bird-fancier's hand, and her own precipitate purchase of the siskin, to fill the aching void in her mother's heart.

Mrs. Warham heard her to the end with a countenance so unalterably fixed in pain and disapproval, that no word was needed to inform Sabrina of her failure.

"I suppose you meant it kindly," said the widow at last, "but you have evidently no understanding of how one feels in such a case. To think—to think that I would let my Buddhie's place be taken like that!"

Whereat, as though anxious to show how effective a substitute he could be, the despised siskin broke cheerfully into song. A faint spasm



## CHAPTER XV

### THE CARRIER'S CART

DURING the short days of winter, Tam George's hour for leaving the Blue Bear on the home-journey was three o'clock in the afternoon. On one particular day near the middle of February, having more than his usual load of parcels, it chanced that he was late in setting out.

Just as he was starting he received a hail from the rear. Valentine Reddie, issuing from the inn, swung up a small valise, and asked to be taken to East Gill. Tam George, with much alacrity, made room on the seat beside him, for being talkative he liked company. Bestowing on Reddie a nod of respectful recognition, "I think I've seen you before, sir," said he.

"Very likely," replied the other. "I have been about these parts before, on and off."

They stopped several times, as they drove through the town, to pick up waiting parcels.

"You seem to be in demand to-day," remarked Reddie.

"Well, yes; you see, sir, it be half-market-day; and then to-morrow's rather a busy sort of day too."

"Why, what is to-morrow?"

"Well, lovering day, I calls it. Valentine day's the more common word for 't."

Reddie slapped his knee. "Why, by all that's lucky, so it is!" he cried. "So you keep that old custom going in these parts, do you?"

"Oh yes, sir; it's a good deal done. There's many more valentines than banns in a year, I reckon."

"Then I suppose some of these parcels you are carrying have something to do with it?"

"It wouldn't be unlikely, sir. I shall know when I've seen the addresses."

"Ah, yes! I suppose you guess most of what goes on in a small place like East Gill."

"Perhaps I do, sir; it isn't for me to boast."

The subject seemed to have an interest for his companion, as one not remote from his own youthful proclivities.

"Any great beauties about your way?" he asked. "East Gill seems a likely sort of place for love-making; it affords plenty of cover."

"Well, I don't know about beauties," answered the carrier. "Ay, there's one; but she won't mate wi' any one in these parts, I reckon."

"Who may that be?" asked the young man, preserving a tone of mere idle inquiry.

Tam George was about to reply, when his horse suddenly drew up before a small roundabout house with a big gate-post standing before it.

"Rot the beast!" cried the carrier, plying his whip; "shall I never get 'un to go by that post without stopping, I wonder? I thought I'd cured 'un," he went on as the cart proceeded on its way; "but he's been out to grass lately, and here the habit come back to 'un. Nature's as strong as folly any day, I do believe; and it's saying a deal, that is."

He explained that here had been the old turnpike, recently done away with, a stopping-point for the beast during the last thirty years, since it had served not only for the collection of toll, but of parcels as well.

They were now clear of the town; turning off from the main road, they saw ahead of them, striding at a good pace, a man in coastguard's

uniform. Coming within hail, the carrier gave a call.

"You seem in a hurry, Dan Curtis; will you have a lift? That is, if you don't mind the squeeze, sir," he added, turning to Reddie, who as paying passenger had the right to a say in a matter affecting his own comfort. Valentine was quite willing.

The coastguard nodding acceptance of the offer, climbed into the cart. He was a big, burly fellow, and to accommodate him they had to sit close, a circumstance which, as a rule, promotes good-comradeship. The newcomer was, however, indomitably silent, a mere dealer in monosyllables.

"Going to Cover Cliff station?" inquired Tam George.

The man nodded.

"I'll put you down at Tapp's corner, then?" said the carrier, and was met once more by mute agreement to his proposal. He seemed not in the least to resent this unsociable treatment from the man whose legs he was saving, and talked on, contented with the sound of his own tongue; Reddie and the coastguard, meanwhile, sitting silent shoulder to shoulder.

The former companionably made an offer of tobacco.

"I've my own," said the man, adding, as a late afterthought, "Thank you all the same." He had not a morose face; it was broad and honest, the true salt-sea weather-front of a British sailor; a man of muscle, as Reddie could feel from the close contact of shoulder and arm, and still youthful, though his heavy build suggested that he was past thirty; very blue eyes gave an air of childish simplicity to the beef-steak countenance. From his general appearance one would have reckoned to find him sociable; he was a curious negative to this indexing of character.

He got down at the corner named by the

carrier, whence a rough track led through a hollowing in the downs to a coastguard station standing lonely on an exposed point about a mile from the East Gill road.

"That fellow has saved ten lives," remarked Tam George, in testimony to his worth when they had parted. "Do you know, now, he used to be good company?"

"I should not have thought it," replied Reddie.

"Ah, he's had a misfortune; he lost his sweetheart, poor chap."

"Dead?"

"No, run away; no one knows where to; with another chap, 'tis supposed. He's never been the same man since."

"Was she his sweetheart really?" inquired Reddie.

"Well, every one thought so, who saw 'em together. There was no doubt about his feelings; the man was only waiting for leave to marry 'on the strength,' and he might ha' had it this year, for he's served his time already; but now he's lost her, and it don't seem as if he cared for anything."

"It sounds unfortunate," returned the other in a thoughtful tone. "Has saved lives, you said?"

"Ay, that fellow can swim, I tell you! Why, he goes down and he bathes in a storm,—or what we landsmen would think such; I've seen him myself, out to a buoy and back, where a man 'ud rather not be in a boat, I know. Ay, ten lives; two since he's been here."

"Is he stationed at Cover Cliff?"

"Sometimes there, sometimes over beyond West Gill; they shifts 'em about. Government's got an idea of not letting coastguards stop long at one place, for fear of their getting familiar with the inhabitants."

"Why is that?"

"Oh, it's the old idea; they are the police, you see; it don't do for them to be too friendly. If

they marry in the district, they are generally soon moved out of it. Seems a queer unneighbourly notion, don't it?"

"It may have its advantages," said Reddie, who seemed now to be deeply cogitating. "It avoids the trouble of a mother-in-law, I mean," he added in a lighter tone.

"Well, so it do, sir; I hadn't thought of it that way."

"It's there that the solution of the marriage problem lies," said Reddie. "English people are behindhand in such matters. Now, I have been among a tribe in South seas where the mother-in-law is eaten at the wedding-breakfast. A good idea I call that!"

"Well, sir, I can understand it," said Tam George, guardedly. "My afflictions in that way are over; but I can look back and sympathize, well I can! So you be a traveller, be 'ee, sir?"

"Well, I have seen a little bit of the world in my day. I have even been to East Gill before, as you seem to remember."

"Yes, sir, I have the occasion in my mind now; Castle Arms, warn't it? Ah, I thought so."

"I suppose that in East Gill a stranger's coming is remembered? You must have wondered where I sprung from—also, perhaps, what I was there for?"

"Well, yes, we did just have a talk over 'ee, I don't doubt, seeing that a stranger's a rarity in our parts."

"And did you come to any conclusion?"

"No; we just dropped ye again, as of no great importance. But I've generally a good memory for faces."

"Ah well," said Reddie, with the air of a man relieved, "I shall not be a stranger much longer; I expect now to be in the neighbourhood for some months."

"Coming to the Castle, sir?"

"No; not to the Castle exactly, though I may take it in passing — if it chooses to stand siege. My mark will be a bit nearer the coast."

"What, Lorry's Farm, then?"

"What place is that?"

"That's where the Beauty lives; the one you was asking me about."

"Miss Warham, do you mean?"

"Ay, I mean her; it seems you know her?"

Reddie paused for a moment before replying.

"Yes, I know her rather well," said he.

"You know all the family, then, I suppose?"

"Less well," said Reddie.

In the talk that followed, Tam George, under the impression that he was extracting news, imparted to Reddie all that was generally known in the neighbourhood concerning the Warhams and the Lorrys. East Gill was a small place, and an hour's conversation with Tam George was a liberal education in the history of its inhabitants. Before they entered the village the young man got down, preferring for the remainder of the distance to walk.

"Leave my bag at the Castle Arms," said he, "and say they may expect me in about an hour's time."

Tam George, in delivering that message from a gentleman who meant still to be an hour on the road, expressed the conviction that a suitor for the beautiful Miss Warham had arrived; and a real proper gentleman he was, declared the carrier, whose inclination to view all men favourably had in this instance been quickened by good coin of the realm, after a hob-nob drive in company with one who knew well how to be affable.

"He be come over to be her valentine," said he; and considering his small knowledge of the matter, he could not well have come nearer the mark.

Valentine Reddie was a man with one high and enviable virtue—he had youth; and had it in

singular extent and quality. He was youthful in mind, in body, and in conscience; there was not a furrow, not a wrinkle, in the composed experiences of life which he had laid to heart, or allowed to leave their impression on his brain. This was all the more to his credit, seeing that he had faced physical hardship, and was endowed with intelligence. He had allowed neither circumstance to age him; he possessed essentially the recreative faculty, the power of making the present do duty for the past, or of forgetting the present in a sure anticipation of the future. Thus a casual observer or comrade might have regarded him as owner of all the virtues under the sun, so blithely could he meet and surmount the afflictions of the moment; or, robbed of the present, regard the future as still his own. But the harder virtues have not the sun to shine on them, nor do they make themselves so readily known to the beholder. Under the sun, Valentine Reddie was a staunch comrade of men, a gay lover of women, quick in thought and action, generous in word and deed if good-humoured tolerance and free-handedness deserve the name. These social good qualities were of a rather unscrupulous kind; he would indulge a warm impulse with only one thought as to its results — it pleased him to please; if he had a passion rooted and unchangeable it was to be approved of men, and not of men only. To this end he possessed a quality which many have prayed for as a safeguard — which to him was none — that, namely, of seeing himself by the eyes of others. This gift accounted perhaps more than anything for his good opinion of himself and the world, for his many friendships, his easy comradeship, his few dislikes. It represented his knowledge of men; his mind tracking another's had the tension of an angler's line cunningly adjusted to the task of drawing in its prey while knowing the limits of its own strength; and he had the power to desist in a moment from the

unattainable, when he recognized that it was beyond him. On occasion, but not often, his sanguine temperament led him into error; his foible then was to discover success in some new direction. Women had been obliged to suffer for this weakness in him; it had accounted for the exceeding brief widowhood of his many boyish courtships, and for one or two precipitancies which had led to a final moment of disillusion.

Let it be remembered that youth is but type, out of which the individual at last hardens, shaping its moral limitations; and that some youth is singularly unstained in essence by the actual things it has done. The persistent worth which your raging reformer does half-angrily recognize in men of unreformed character and lax ethics is more largely an outcome of pure blood and mere animal health than moralists will find safe to admit. Women, on the other hand, are, as a rule, more foolishly sanguine, and believe in their own power to purify when the physical deterioration has set in. There are correspondences in wear and tear on the moral plane with those of the physical; and the happy gift of irresponsibility dowers many a man with value of a sort after an experience of life which cannot be indulged in by his more thoughtful brethren without bankruptcy. The shortcoming of these from the higher rewards is primal and ingrained rather than a result of their following of nature, and is discerned less by the eye of reason than by the inward consciousness of the soul.

Valentine Reddie was as unspoiled as his mother had left him, when in his early boyhood they parted, he for public-school life, she for the reconciling touch of earth which bitter experience almost before the passing of her first youth had rendered acceptable. Her portrait, together with a small allowance paid in trusteeship by a legal firm, and continued to the son after his mother's demise, were, in addition to his name, the sole proofs of his origin.



He was without history, and without relatives, yet at the age of twenty-four he had by his own exertions secured a firm footing on the ladder of success. He had worked, he had travelled, and he had lived, and had found life and work and travel well worth the time spent on them; it may be doubted whether he had ever conceived the wish to blot a single day out of his existence, or a single folly from his sum of wisdom.

Under a dusk, chilly with soft rain, Valentine Reddie turned first in the direction of Amesbay, and gazed speculatively in passing on the windows of the Monastery Farm. Yet later, he entered the Castle Park, not keeping strictly to the right of way, and there strolled under sodden boughs, his feet deep in decayed beech-leaves. At the inn he made himself welcome, and his name known, but not his business; though Tam George made artful hooks and eyes of the conversation throughout the evening with a view to securing it.

His sleep during the night was broken by the querulous whimperings and barkings of a young hound chained up in the inn-yard, unused, it would seem, to such close confinement. In the morning, on looking out, he saw a large travelling-crate which had apparently served as kennel for the disturber of his night's rest; but the beast was no longer there. The landlord informed him that it had arrived at a late hour the previous evening; too late to be passed on to its destination, and that a man had come down for it from the Castle the first thing that morning.

## CHAPTER XVI

### VALENTINE'S DAY

IN the winding lane that goes down from East Gill to Amesbay, Valentine Reddie was rapturously charged upon and fawned over by a streak of grey lightning with four muddy paws. A young deerhound of foal-like proportions had swept him from head to foot with welcoming caress, and was still for making an end of him when the cry of its keeper struck his ears.

"Down, down, Ron!" called the voice.

He looked. Sabrina Warham was before him. He fought the leaping thing, mastered it at last, hand on collar held it down, saluting under difficulties.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" cried Sabrina. "It is shameful! He has muddied you all over."

"I don't in the least mind if he is yours," said Reddie, tussling with loving jaws.

"He isn't mine! At least, he only came this morning, and there's no holding him at all. I have to carry a whip to keep him off. What a dreadful mess he has made of you!"

Sabrina's distress was of the kind that yields easily to laughter if allowed to. Valentine gave the lead; it was the shortest of short cuts to putting them on good terms. As he held the struggling creature by its collar, he noticed a leathern label bearing the inscription, "My name is Ron." It was the name he had heard Sabrina use when calling the dog back.

"Heavens, what a handful!" he cried, laughing, throwing the animal off to arm's length for a moment, and taking over the whip. "Now, sir, down! down! I wonder you dared come out with him alone."

"I hardly knew what else to do; either he was in mischief, or else he howled. It is a dreadful mistake his coming at all; he is beautiful and dear, but I wish I were rid of him. And I must be somehow, only I don't know how."

She seemed in genuine perplexity.

"He came to-day, you say?" Reddie remarked, smiling.

"Yes; only this morning."

"And a present to-day, of course, has a special value."

"Not value necessarily."

"Significance, let us say. And so you have a trouble about getting rid of it?"

"It is certainly very inconvenient—altogether foolish; the last thing I should have wished under any circumstance."

"You do not favour pets, then? Yet I have known you take trouble on their behalf; it was that brought us to our last meeting."

"Oh yes," replied Sabrina, "if they suffer, it goes to my heart. It seems a wrong that they too should endure pain, if they have neither souls nor responsibility as we have. It makes the doctrine of pain sound foolishness to me when I hear it."

"There you go beyond me," said Reddie; "I do without doctrines. But in the matter of animals, have you no favourites?"

"I have my likings, but no favourites at all, if you mean pets."

"I remember, you said not."

"The petting of animals seems to me to have something degrading in it, both for the owner and the owned."

"But how can the love of one's fellow-creatures be degrading?"

"I do not call it love; it is indulgence. Two years ago I knew a lady who had as a pet a small dog; all its little vices were extolled and held up to admiration as showing 'character'; its daintiness over food was encouraged as a proof of its gentility; its jealousy of other people was flattered by elaborate cajoleries, its very smallness was regarded as a justification for the monstrous tyranny it exercised."

"A good deal of love," remarked Reddie, "goes on those lines, I imagine; and women are the recipients. Do you find that they object to it?"

"If they do not," said Sabrina, "I pity them!"

"You pity others?" remarked her companion. "And yet," he went on hardily, "I imagine that men, in certain circumstances, would wish to feel your power, your tyranny, if you like to call it so."

"That is hardly likely. I have not enough wisdom to give safe direction to any one," she answered.

Valentine glanced at her keenly to make sure of her sincerity.

"Wisdom is not everything, Miss Warham. Forgive me for not pretending ignorance of your name."

"Indeed, you remind me," answered Sabrina, "what I should have said long ago; it is now *my* turn to thank *you*. The trouble you so kindly took has given very real gratification to my mother."

"Now may I pretend not to know what you refer to?" said her companion.

"Please do not; in conferring a favour, you incur also a debt. You must allow me to thank you."

"You complete the pleasure the work gave me. The likeness, then, was successful?"

"My mother, who loved the original, could tell you better than I. I told her of my suspicions.

She wished she could have had an opportunity to thank you."

"According to you I ought to give it," said Valentine. "May I some day? Not that I want more thanks now. It so happens, Miss Warham, that I shall be in this neighbourhood for some time, perhaps at Wedport, perhaps for the convenience of my work much nearer, if I can find lodging. Will you allow me, alone as I shall be in these solitudes, to come and pay my respects to Mrs. Warham and yourself without further introduction? You see, I am not conventional. Now, if you wish, without convention say no. I promise not to be offended."

"It is hardly a question of yes or no. Indeed, I thank you for wishing it. But my mother is a great invalid, and sees few people."

"Surely I am few enough, for I am solitary."

Sabrina, smiling, said: "If you named to-day — now — I could not well refuse you, since I ought at least to offer you the use of a clothes-brush."

"You ought, indeed," replied Reddie, laughing. "You see, then, the matter has been decided for us. I like that dog of yours!"

"I don't see how I can possibly keep him."

"You think such a big valentine should not have come uninvited? I, too, then, must tread warily. What a pity you don't believe in omens!"

"What omen do you want me to believe in?"

"That this dog which you wish to keep no longer than a day seems to have turned up for the express purpose of introducing me to your — clothes-brush. Every dog has his day; this is mine, you will remember; the calendar of saints declares it."

Sabrina was not paying much attention to her companion's light speeches; she was occupied in wondering how the introduction of this total stranger was to be brought about, and how it would be regarded. To her surprise, Mrs. Warham made no difficulty when, on arriving at the farm,

she preceded the visitor in order to announce him.

"Yes, my dear, certainly," said the widow, removing her eye-shade, and smoothing the folds of her gown with ceremonious instinct. "I shall be very pleased to have the opportunity of thanking him. You did quite right, since he happens to be in our neighbourhood."

She extended to the young man a gracious welcome. Sabrina watched, listened, and was pleased. Somehow Valentine Reddie, with his ingratiating way, with those touches of tenderness toward infirmity which, when found in youth, have so prevailing a charm, reminded her of Lady Berrers, whose visit had for a brief hour made her mother grow young again. There was the same flush on the widow's face, the same melting of imposed reserve, in modest response to outside homage, which the daughter had seen once before.

"You like him, mother?" she asked, when Valentine had departed.

"He is a thorough gentleman," replied the elder lady.

It meant that he satisfied her worldly creed.

## CHAPTER XVII

### "LOVE MY DOG"

RONALD'S return with the winds of March was not needed to inform Sabrina that there was more love awaiting her in the world than she had power to return. His soft jealousy did but open her eyes more clearly to a fact she had long fought against believing. A new sense of responsibility settled on her, and also a strange fear and unrest. In this dark mood she would often go up to the downs, and there seek counsel with the dim, watery horizon, along which, borne east or west by spring tides, the spool could be seen trailing its length grey and serpentine. And at times, so full of apprehension grew her regard, she seemed to be watching for some black sail freighted with doom, like that which had come of old to the coasts of Crete.

Ronald one day found her weeping, and, of course, there was a scene. She ordered him away.

"Yes, I know I haven't got a chance now!" said the boy. "I never had against him. I'll go and bury my head in a rabbit-hole and die!" He abandoned himself to earth, raising his head again to say, "David goes about killing trapped rabbits; he never used to be bloodthirsty. I wish he'd kill me!"

"Oh, go, go!" she cried, unable to show her face.

"Don't think that I don't love him!" he said. "I do! And I will go if you will only promise to keep Ron; I won't ever trouble you again. Look,

as I am lying now, if you pushed me, I should trundle right over into the sea. Oh, Sabrina dear, please do! and all the way down I'll be blessing you for it!"

Sabrina left him to cry out in solitude. It seemed she had but one sensible acquaintance among men, offering possible friendship; common rational interests and the life of the intellect she found to be the surest safeguards against sentiment. Even Lady Berrers was angry with her, yet would give no reason: the question, "Are you honest?" had been put to her as though Ronald's folly was now to become an accusation against her.

She had returned him his gift; but refusal was useless. It came back garlanded for sacrifice, bearing on its collar sentence of death. If she refused it a home, it was to be shot on the downs at sunrise.

Pity for the poor brute forced her to keep him. David took charge of him, breaking the untamed mind to obedience. Yet his desire was to his mistress: he came like an arrow to her call, a devastation in flight, a melting of mouth and loving eyes in adoration at her feet. The resemblance to Roland was striking. In all ways he was as dear and foolish as his giver and namesake, only less troublesome.

His cajoling love forced Sabrina to relax her theories. Often she made him the recipient of her griefs, laying her face to his, and soothing her troubled brow against the grey hairs of his witless youth; and as she sought to fathom the beauty of the eyes which looked out from a mere brute brain, her thought was less of Ronald than of another.

She longed for a woman's heart to lean on, to confide in, so that hearing herself speak she might become more sure of her own mind. Lady Berrers kept her effectually at arm's length by a too sanguine air of curiosity which puzzled while it annoyed her; she seemed all on thorns for Sabrina



to fulfil some promptings of fate to which she held the clue, and was for ever shadowing it forth as the prosecuting counsel foreshadows the halter to the uncondemned criminal. Soon after her return to East Gill, she met Valentine Reddie in Sabrina's company, then again in the widow's parlour; and after a brief study of him had no difficulty in comprehending one half at least of the situation. As regards Sabrina she was more in doubt, and remained so even when by her instrumentality Reddie was called in to give an inventory of the geological specimens contained in the Castle museum. The young man, being already in Government employ, was able to send in an informal report on the subject which might hereafter prove useful. He made a good impression on the Squire, and aroused Lady Berrers' interest, in spite of her private reasons for regarding him rather jealously as an interloper. She could see that Sabrina liked him.

"Where have I seen that young man before?" asked the Squire, after the first interview.

"Ah," replied his daughter, "I have just the same impression; but I do not think we have met him. I fancy it must be merely likeness."

"He seems to me agreeable and well behaved," said the Squire; "and he has the requisite knowledge. I must have the museum looked into; it wants doing like the library."

"I think that can wait," replied Lady Berrers. "He will be here, I understand, for a good while; and it is better not to have two turn-outs going on at the same time. Miss Warham has her hands full in the library; and it might be inconvenient."

Nevertheless the Squire had his own way, and Reddie was commissioned, when he could spare time to lend his services.

He was then back at Wedport, getting the bulk of his task finished so as not to delay the advancing harbour works, which were of more

general importance than scientific research. Meanwhile his personal interests were drawing him in the direction of East Gill. At this juncture he heard of a small coastguard station halfway between the two places, which was about to be abandoned for new quarters. The “strength” there had already been diminished by half, and in the dismantled and unoccupied portion he was permitted, by official sanction, to make a temporary storage of his unsorted specimens. Finding the arrangement convenient, when press of work was over he shifted his quarters from Wedport, and took lodging on the premises. Thus he was brought within six miles of East Gill, and Sabrina began to see a good deal of him, occasionally in her own home, more often at the Castle library.

She found his conversation pleasant; irresponsible though he seemed now and then, and prone to flattery, she regarded this merely as an outcome of his natural spirits, a laughing aside from the serious interests to which he bent his energies. He sought her because he had information to give, because she had interest to offer in exchange; and he paid her the subtle compliment of an argument or contradiction if ever she made a statement without full knowledge to back it.

“You are worth fighting,” he said to her one day. “So few women are.”

“I might say the same of men,” she answered equably, to what seemed his tone of patronage.

He smiled back frankly, saying, “Your rebuke is just; it is not the thing to say, yet one must think it.”

Their talks were chiefly about books and natural history; she read in him enthusiasm for experiment and discovery, and found no trace in his manner of that fire of the male, of which, according to Lady Berrers, she must inevitably some day be the high recipient or the victim.

Reddie bore himself merely as a friend, showing

a face that was always without a cloud, and a manner without embarrassment. He rose in her estimation, as he intended that he should.

The trouble Ronald gave her meanwhile was a sort she could at times afford to laugh at; but to another and more secret one she bore a grave face; and, if the truth must be told, her heart ached for him. Often in those days, looking into her dog Ron's beautiful eyes, she shook her head at them. "No, Ron, it won't do; it won't do!" she said. Sometimes his head was wet with her tears.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### WORDS AND DEEDS

FARMER LORRY was slowly recovering from the blow dealt to his prestige, and was resuming those reins of domestic authority which he had needlessly laid down. Though the farm had passed into other hands, his house remained to him; there he could sit master, casting an evil eye on the government and order that went on round him: and there of a truth he sat, like the Papacy deprived of its temporal powers, as intractable and as unforgiving to the supplanting authority.

The winter had shaken him considerably. Over a long spell of weeks bed had been the right place for him, and the visits of his doctor needed for other reasons than as a salve for wounded vanity. But with the spring he rose again, and first from his chair, and then from his own legs, saw once more to the machinery of his household. He found it, by his own account, terribly rusty, and applied remedies like the rasping of a file, audible during all waking hours. Like a child with its noise he seemed the very last person to be exhausted by his own clamour. Finding traces there of unduly prolonged trespass he locked the door of the painted parlour, alleging for excuse that within lay the money of the establishment.

"It isn't the beer cellar!" he cried, when his son was in earshot. "I suppose I may lock up my money—or mayn't I?" This to no word of objection from any one. Before a week was out he

found the business of the key too troublesome; lack of opposition robbed the ordinance of its relish.

Sunshine brought him out of doors again. On fine days he sat in the porch from early morning till late afternoon, gazing over the fields seawards. Here a few of the local farmers, victims to habit or misled by a neighbourly instinct, would come to visit him and be convinced of their gross ignorance of farm matters; to be taught also how blessed were they who lacked sons to hound them to the grave, and stand near waiting to pick their bones.

"My money isn't safe now!" he fumed, as though custody of the key had been wrung from him by violence. "I'm not allowed to keep my accounts even. He lets me draw the cheques for him—he does that; and the farm's costing double!"

These half-truths—doubled returns being left out of the reckoning—supplied him with the grievances necessary for the keeping up of his spirits.

Sabrina, on his reappearance, found that his animosity against her had increased. He would now reply to her greeting with girding remarks on her personal appearance. "A fine day, uncle!" called forth the response, "Ay, ye look fine; but there's no wear in it! Flimsy!" He left the remark to apply either to her dress or her person. If she chanced to be carrying a basket, attack would come with the query, "Well, what have ye got there?—'taters?—cabbages?—been getting 'em out of my fields, I suppose." Sabrina found forbearance easy; but it was no use trying to be sweet to him. There was no wine mixed with the sour vinegar of his nature, and her apparent unconsciousness of his attacks only exasperated him the more.

One day she found him in company of a certain Mr. Creswick, a neighbouring farmer of means, notorious as a widower in search of a fourth wife;

a big figure of a man, age something over fifty, tawny and ruddy like his own meadows of buttercup and field-sorrel.

"Ay, here she is!" remarked Farmer Lorry, in the girl's hearing as she approached. "Sit ye down, Zabby. This be Mr. Creswick, come to ask a'ter you; and I tell him you'll show him how a London young lady can talk. Well, neighbour, the way's made plain to 'ee now."

Farmer Creswick plunged off into his crops; his ground seemed heavy-going under him.

"Here, William," broke in the farmer, "ye didn't come to talk crops, did ye?"

"Didn't I?" quoth the other, all abroad for cover into which to retreat.

Sight of my lady from the Castle, just then approaching, gave Mr. Creswick his excuse to get up and go.

"Ah!" snarled the old man, maliciously, when the visitor's back was turned, "you're too fine a lady for him, Zabby. Soon as he saw you he didn't dare put in a word."

Lady Berrers sailing in on him unabashed, received warning to take care of his toe.

"Sorry I can't get up to ye, my lady," he went on; "but I be past expecting fine folk with their fine manners to come a-visiting me. Here's my niece been flouting a good offer of marriage!"

"Uncle!" cried Sabrina, all on fire.

Lady Berrers' face fell into consternation. Sabrina's seemed to confirm the news she most dreaded to hear.

"Ay," went on the farmer, "there the man goes, too heart-broken to lift up his head. She, with her fine ways, done that; and he's had experience, too. She'd have made his fourth wife, and might have learned dairying."

The lady recovered her looks speedily. "You are making your niece blush, Mr. Lorry," she said, laughing. "These delicate affairs of the heart

should not be trumpeted, especially when they fall out unfortunately."

"Ay," answered the incurable old man; "but I know what she's after—she's setting her cap at my son David! And I'll not have him marrying a lady—no, I won't!"

"So you object to ladies, Mr. Lorry?" said the dame, archly.

"Ay, and lords," replied the farmer, stoutly. "Oh, ye've been always mighty dainty in your own marriages, my lady, I know that. That's your own choice; but I won't have Lorry blood mixing itself where it's no right to. It was beef, and not gentry, made this country what it is; and I'll see plain English beef go to the stocking of my farm, or David may whistle for it."

"Then his wife is to be—beefy?" inquired Lady Berrers. "I congratulate you, and him, and your descendants. Sabrina, may I come in and see your mother?"

Thus she got free of him, carrying Sabrina off with her. The ease with which she parried and beat down his thrusts did not make him more tolerant of the intrusion of the Lutworth gang on his premises. And she could laugh, could she? He heard merriment going on in the upper chamber. Sabrina and David between them had brought it about that he could no longer call this house his own; it was open even to the hereditary enemy.

Hobbling into the stable yard at the rear, whom should he find but Ronald Lutworth, of all people, grooming the carriage-pony.

"The place is alive with 'em!" shouted the exasperated farmer. "Who told you to come here, eh?"

"I didn't hear any one tell me to," said Ronald; "I just chanced it." And the work went on.

"Oh, didn't ye? Didn't ye?" fumed the old man, advancing within spash of his operations.

"Then maybe ye'll hear when some one tells ye to

go! D'ye hear that, now?" He struck the bucket with his stick, and sent it flying. "D'ye hear *that?*"

"I hear but I don't see," said Ronald. He carried the pail over to the tap, and started refilling it. Lorry hobbled after him furious.

"Hey! Hey! What are ye doing here? What are ye doing here?" he raged, making a renewed assault with his stick.

"Violent and magenta old man," replied the youth, "I am doing exactly what I like — making myself useful." And he continued to do it.

Wordy war cannot be waged in incompatible vocabularies. The wit who retorted "Parallelogram!" on the frenzied fish-wife of Dublin, crushed the head of her invective and left her speechless. So the farmer, hearing himself described in unheard of terms of contumely, might have flown to his glass to refute the charge; but tongue could give no outlet to his wrath. Instead he flew to action, and crying, "I'll clear ye out! I'll pack ye!" shambled in haste to the shed where the young Jersey bull was in loose stabling. Unhasping the gate, he swung it open, and, reaching across the barrier, dealt the bull a resounding thwack on the hind-quarters.

The harassed beast swung about and broke for the open; smitten again as it emerged, up went its heels, back crashed the gate. Lorry fell.

Ronald ran up in some alarm at what seemed like a catastrophe. The old man had some blood on his face to show.

"See what you've done to me!" he whimpered, lying low in the straw; "and in my own yard, too!" He allowed himself to be lifted by degrees, saying, "That comes of trespassing. I'll have the law on you, that I will!" Set upon his legs again, he had to stand and see Ronald drive in the bull. "Now, maybe you'll let that pony alone," he railed, indomitable of whim, when the gate was once more



fast; and this time he was obeyed. "Magenta old man, am I?" came as his parting shot; but the colour was out of him when he returned to the house.

Word of the affair reached the Squire in due form. Lorry demanded that his doctor's bill should be paid. No bill had been presented; but without asking to see it, the Squire contemptuously enclosed a blank cheque in a letter formally repudiating the claim. This Lorry returned for lack of the apology that should have gone with it. He would now take other means to obtain satisfaction, and hoped the Squire would have the decency to keep off the bench when the case came on at petty sessions.

The two old men, hugging the quarrel to themselves, had brought things to this pass, when word of what was going on reached other members of the two houses. Ronald came and sat by the old man's side, and, with an eye on Sabrina's window, listened to his railings in demure and undisturbed satisfaction. At the end of them he craved permission to continue grooming the pony whenever the spirit so moved him.

"Well, you may *now*," said the old man, having taken payment.

Ronald then said, for there was no limit to the pageantry of his affections—

"Mr. Lorry, I love your niece."

"What the devil for?" asked the old man, petrified.

"For ever, always!" affirmed the youth. "She's the only woman I can love."

"Oh, take her, take her!" cried the other, as though by a wave of the hand he were disposing of bad rubbish. And Ronald retired, enriched by the farmer's consent.

"That Lutworth cub is wanting to have you now!" he announced to his niece, on their next meeting. "Will you put up with him, or will you go back to Creswick after all? I shan't have any

peace till I've got ye married away from my door; so the sharper ye are about it the better I'll be pleased! I don't want man-traps on my premises."

Sabrina's resentment at so scurrilous an assault upon her rights gave her courage to retort —

"Cry shame on yourself, uncle! You are a very foolish, wicked old man to harbour such thoughts!"

He did not like her the worse for not trying to be soft with him. "Oh, call me magenta, if you like!" said he. It was wonderful how that phrase had stuck.

In this, at least, old Lorry was like Ronald, he could not conceal his loves and hates; rancour and suspicion must out. So, having the thing in his head, he must need say to his son one day —

"David, that girl's setting her cap at you. Mind, now; I've told ye!"

David looked his parent down with an eye that held him mute.

"Then ye've told a lie, father," he said at last. "Say another word like that, and I'm gone!" He smote fist to table to drive his meaning home. After that thunder silence reigned. Lorry had learned that, when his son spoke thus, his word was a rod of iron.

## CHAPTER XIX

### POINTS OF VIEW

As spring days advanced and grew warm, Sabrina's solitary visits to the down became a daily occupation. But there was now a change; she no longer climbed the same down, she no longer sat looking out over the same seaward view.

Deserting the ridge which divided West Gill from Amesbay, she sought instead by a more arduous ascent the one immediately to the rear of the farm, upon whose crest lay the Roman encampment. Here, spent of breath, and without energy to mount further, she would sink down at the foot of the first great rampart, the outer edge of a vast system of intrenchments. From this point, she could look down upon the farm, with all its peace and domestic order open to view, a collocation of rough rectangular cells, each fulfilling an economic purpose, each with its attendant human energy to give it life. Here the stone walls rose stunted under their eaves, lifting grey-tiled and thatched roofs into unaccustomed prominence; cobbled alley and flagged court, turf-plot and bedding-ground, pond and stable-yard, all stood out distinctively like the patterns of a mosaic. Across these went dark blots of human bodies fulfilling the routine of labour, and, though small, easily distinguishable, either by peculiarity of gait or by the particular work on which they were engaged. Sometimes they had not even to be visible in order to be known; the impact of clogs

on stone-paving, the swish of water, and the clatter of a pail told that the maid Sally was washing the back-yard; a prolonged rattling of cans that the scouring of the milking tins had begun; an occasional movement under the branches of nuts and fruit trees showed where a certain old Rachel was weeding up groundsel; an ecstatic squealing in the back premises told that William Hedges had arrived with the pig's wash-pail; a figure of hesitating gait going slowly from house to yard and back again was old Lorry, spying out the land; another of more even pace, with a dog following at heel, was David starting upon his rounds. Sabrina would watch him, and wonder at the apparent ease with which he got through all his work. "Never hurry, never rest," seemed to be the motto of his days.

The country was now mantling day by day into fresh beauty; soft clouds of plum-blossom lay against the grey roofs of the farm; the almond flower was passing, pear and cherry bloom had begun; the Castle woods were shooting out fires of green or smouldering in red; and Sabrina, looking on all the fairness of that scene, turned her heart resolutely away from it, schooling herself to the conviction that such life as it offered would mean imprisonment to her energies, and paralysis to her brain. This inborn apprehension was of no new growth; but recent events had quickened it. Sensitive pride, moreover, was now in arms; she had been taught definitely to feel that her presence was unwelcome, and that not only by her uncle, for whose harsh tempers she had long made due allowance, but in a far more painful way by her own mother, whose soft opposition to any attempt she made at home-like familiarity with her surroundings grew more apparent as time went on.

Even Lady Berrers had grown impatient, and seemed to have a suspicion of her, not to be concealed by all the warm friendliness of their

actual intercourse. In eye and manner there was for ever implied a charge not expressed in words: "You are behaving badly, my dear!" And the sense of its injustice sealed the girl's lips and kept her from confiding in one she really loved, and was grieved to have unwittingly offended. It seemed as though the reproach levelled against her was the continued incurableness of Ronald's passion.

When Mrs. Warham herself spoke of the matter, she felt deeply the affront which her friendly treatment of youth's infatuation had brought on her; her mother actually warned her to be careful for herself! As though ——! Wounded self-respect would not allow her to put the thing into words.

"But, dear mother, it is all a mere boy's folly!" she cried. "I don't think of it in any other way."

"Love is often a great folly," replied her mother.

"It is natural, when he is so young."

"That is the danger."

"Surely, you mean the safety? These things do not last long with the very young."

"Long enough, sometimes. My dear, he comes of a family of which nothing safe can be said. I tell you to take care! And oh, my dear, you are too young to understand; but remember, women are in peril when they are loved by certain men."

Seldom had Sabrina seen her mother so moved, so near to true intimacy and communion. She took her hand, pressing it warmly.

"Dear mother," she said, "what is it you want me to do?"

"I wish—I wish, my dear, that you would go away for a time. There are many reasons why I do not like your being here."

Sabrina loosed the hand she was holding. "You do not want me?" she said.

"I can do without you quite well. Sometimes I think you ought not to have come here at all."

"I have long thought that!" answered Sabrina. Little more was said then. It was after this conversation that she began to spend her hours on the down overlooking the farm; and the filling and the falling away of the fruit-blossom were symbols to her long afterwards of thoughts formed to look temptingly fair, which broke when the hard touch of logic fell on them.

While her mind thus halted between two opinions, a new element of interest was beginning to find place there. Insensibly yet surely an intimacy had sprung up between herself and Valentine Reddie. Founded at first on common interests, it developed in a genuine liking and trust upon her part for one who did not afflict her feminine instincts, or cause her to stand on guard, as did others. She met him, in consequence, with a frankness of demeanour which, though it was her true nature, she seldom showed elsewhere.

Speaking one day of his fossil-collection temporarily stored at Hawk's Point coastguard station, he begged her to come over and see it. "That is," he said, "if it is not too far."

The distance was six miles by cliff, something between eight and nine by the road. Sabrina accepted readily; the project gave her an excuse she had long wished for, to follow over the rough coast-line the crests and hollows of the downs lying toward Wedport. Such a walk, too purposeless to attract her otherwise, had now an object.

On the afternoon of the day agreed upon she set off almost in gay spirits; nor was her zest lessened when a hard scud of sleet met her as she descended the first ridge over West Gill, and saw the miniature harbour, grey and blurred, beneath her in the thick network of driving hail. It fell away again like a swept web; far out over the bay ran films of sunlight; one beam rode softly over a distant down, disappeared in a cleft, and rose on a nearer eminence, flooding its face with

gold. The downfall stopped: drawing clear of harbour and hill, it swung its way east; miles behind, Herm's Head dipped into the blackness of storm, but in the other direction blue sky was visible. Westward the day still promised to be fair, and the weather always is what the sanguine eye sees to be ahead. Nevertheless, when at a halfway point Reddie met her, she had encountered storm twice; her face tingled from the sharp whippings of the sleet, and she was not very dry.

"I believe I ought to have turned back," she said, "but I feared you would be here expecting me."

"Most certainly I did," he answered; "I put you down in my mind as weather-proof. Surely you do not think of turning back now?"

"I would not on my own account; but my mother may be anxious."

"She will think you have taken shelter at West Gill, if she thinks anything."

This was so probable that Sabrina, having come so far, settled to go on. The coastguard's wife, who saw to Reddie's wants, could provide her with drying accommodation, and no doubt the weather would clear; the storms were too violent to last.

Before they reached their goal, the wind had driven all dampness out of her. Making her companion's pace her own, she arrived warm and flushed, almost beaten, happy with the exertion. Rallying her to the last ascent—for the station stood on the top of a stiff rise—Reddie expressed admiration of her powers.

"Yes," she said laughing, "you may talk about civilization; if you had skirts to walk against in a high wind, you would know what it is."

"Then petticoat government is really a manly exercise?"

"I believe men devised it as a part of our disfranchisement."

"I have heard you before now speak bitterly on

that subject. Do you think that women are fit for full citizenship?"

"No, I do not; but neither are the majority of men. I admit the shortcomings of my own sex, but not your right to deny us the liberties you abuse."

"According to that, we ought to refuse you nothing."

"You refuse us the wrong things for wrong reasons:—you give us far too much."

"And what about women's dealings with men?"

"They seem to me hardly to reason at all; they go by perverted instinct."

"Some day, Miss Warham," said Reddie, "you may find that reason is not the safest guide in a world that has failed as yet to account for itself. The more we grow in reasoning intelligence, the more we find unexplained."

"What guide, then, do you follow?"

"Frankly, my own instinct."

"Do you rank yourself a Pagan?"

"No; yet perhaps I am one. Shall I ask, in turn, if you rank yourself a Christian?"

"My answer is the same; a negative and a perhaps. I feel that there is something outside of us which moves the world; and perhaps the Christian religion best explains it."

"To my mind," said her companion, "Christianity puts too high a value on the individual, and lowers that of race; therein, I think, lies the true identity—the personality which counts, and carries the world on. It is a particle of that energy which urges each individual man in love, in war, in experiment; he must fight, he must hunt, he must love: he cannot stand still to act the consistent fatalist."

"You say 'man,'" put in Sabrina.

"Yes, and I mean man; and that it shows so far less strongly in woman, convinces me that nature meant her to be passive, a possession, the



territory which man defends as he advances, and moulds to his will that it may mould for him the future of his race."

"You give us small freedom!"

"In a way I claim no more for ourselves. The spirit which impels each man is, in its origin, that same universal breath of race which made the patriarchs the founders of nations, and drove the Romans from their ease and splendour to the conquest of one small savage island. It was nothing, you may say, in comparison to the empire they left behind, yet they could not help themselves; they, too, were slaves as much as the men they held in subjection; for somewhere in us there is a tyranny far stronger than flesh and blood. And yet these great disturbances in us don't fight to live; they fight to perish, to find themselves graves. That is the end of it all! We are standing now on the Roman's grave; and this is the only living thing he has left behind him to mark the spot."

He held up as he spoke a small snail-shell with striped spirals, in the centre of which a pair of dun-coloured horns could be seen disappearing.

"What had the Roman to do with this?" inquired his companion.

"He brought it with him from Italy to make soup of," said Reddie; "and one finds it still in the localities where he pitched his camps. Is it not a fitting monument to his dust now, in this Christian age? for it makes good soup still, and yet is quite useless in the land of its adoption, because prejudice is so much stronger than reason. I could not prevail on Mrs. Owens even to let me make the experiment. Now, what do you think of this for an outlook?"

They had reached the topmost ridge of the down, and stood by the signal-mast, facing seawards. At this point no more than twenty yards of rough turf divided them from the land's end. It broke abruptly, disappearing in sheer immeasurable

descent, till in the far-down distance tiny sails of fishing-boats, rising like moths over the stiff grass-bents of its brow, conveyed by scale what the eye had lost with the sudden vanishing of earth into space. Five miles distant across the blue lay Wedport behind its extending breakwater, a grey line of flat sea-front, seen through a netted screen of the masts and rigging of merchantmen. In one quarter, where a chalky whiteness marked the line of the new harbour works, thin puffs of steam now and again rose, accompanying the circular swing of vast cranes or the hewing and grinding of stone-mills. Behind that scene with its teeming life, Tort Point, bare and desolate, stretched like a bony finger pointing south.

Under instruction, Sabrina saw more than her own eye could have solved; the meaning of things made vision of them grow clearer. From the man on duty Reddie borrowed a spyglass for her to look through; and suddenly the whole scene became alive.

"Why, they are like bees!" she cried, presently adding, "And there are drones too, black creatures, standing idle upon the walls. What are they?"

"Warders," said Reddie. "Most of those bees are convicts."

"What!" she cried, with a hurt sense of justice, "is it by convicts that harbours are built?"

"They have that privilege; it is better for them than the treadmill, is it not?"

"For them?—oh yes, it may be. But for us; surely it condemns a nation that its noblest public works should be produced by such means."

"The Pyramids were built by slaves."

"To be tombs for kings! That seems right enough. The contrast is greater here:—harbours for England's navies by men who have forfeited freedom under her laws! What an irony that seems."

"Is it not rather fine? I see no hope for a

nation that dares not deal sternly with men; softness, and sentiment, and tender consciences only lead to ruin. Nelson flogged those fine devils, his sea-dogs, yet they loved him and won his battles for him; Venice condemned her Doges to fine and imprisonment, — and they came again from prison and poverty and disgrace to fight under her standard. She put out a man's eyes, and still he worked in darkness to serve her. Yes; I believe in race, and in large justice, which involves the doing of many small injustices. Justice to the individual seems to me but a paltry thing to cry after; yet that is the yelp of your radical politicians nowadays; lest the plough should cut up the worm, his cry is, 'Perish India!' On those lines 'Perish England!' will follow before long."

"And meanwhile," retorted Sabrina, "you are for saying perish one half of the human race so that the other half may keep top; your politics are a masculine makeshift. Do you believe that evolution is to accentuate the difference of sex?"

"If sex is a good thing, yes; why not? I hate a muddle!"

Thus they talked in hearty disagreement with each other, a good bond for friendship. Reddie brought her down by a wide detour to the narrow shore below the great cliff, exposed only at low tide.

"Can you mount those ladders?" he inquired. "Some of my work lies on that ledge of rock halfway up."

Sabrina felt that her courage was being put to the test.

"I *can*," she said, rather tremulously, wondering how she would feel when she got there.

"I guarantee that they are well fixed," said her companion.

She started on the ascent, conscious that she would have given much not to go, yet stronger in the determination not to cry off. She even liked,

in a fearful way, this experiment of her own powers; it was purely a matter of nerve, the physical effort was nothing. Setting her mind according to the bidding of Scripture on those things that were above, and forgetting those things that were behind, she accomplished the task. Reddie followed at a respectful distance. Safely lodged, she gazed into the depth beneath, and cried aghast—

“How shall I ever get down?” The descent now looked fearful.

“When you are down again you will look back and say, ‘How did I ever get up?’ That is the way always. Yet you did not find getting here difficult. Now, look at my excavations; do you know what you are standing on?”

“They look like stone columns thrown sideways,” said Sabrina.

“They are, or they were, trees: this was once a forest.” Reddie showed her some of his half-excavated fossils, the gaps whence others had already been taken, the indications of further deposits. Above their heads swung a small wooden cradle on a double pulley—the means, he explained, by which he hauled up the heavier of his specimens. “Once or twice I have myself been up by it,” he remarked, “when I have been in a hurry for some reason.”

Sabrina looked and shuddered. “I wonder you could trust any one!” she declared.

“I trusted myself. I went up steeple-jack fashion—walked up, as it were; there is plenty of foothold not seen from below, and a strong haul on the rope is sufficient to steady one.”

Sabrina showed him moist palms, and rubbed them miserably to get free from the shiver of his narrative.

“Why do you do such things?” she asked, half vexed; “and why tell me of them now? Did you not feel that you were doing wrong, foolishly, to hang your life on so risky a chance?”

"On the contrary, I felt a curious delight. I was in my own hands, my own master absolutely — in the opposite way to the suicide. I had the will-power to save and keep my life, just by holding on and putting out my best energies. When I got to the top I respected myself as I never had done before. But the feeling wears off; my second and my third attempt were not nearly so exciting."

"Oh, pray don't make a habit of it!" cried Sabrina. "How shall I ever be comfortable when I think of you at work here? Do promise not to do it! The cord looks far too thin for a man's weight."

Reddie regarded her with an earnestness equal to her own; but when he spoke it was only to assure her that the rope had been well tested.

"Let me show you how it works," he said. "No, I don't mean by going up myself: there is a block here almost ready for removal, and I have my tools with me. Now you shall see me as a stonemason."

She watched him at work with his small picks and hammers, dealing deft blows cunningly from point to point; it seemed more like a sculptor's work than stone-cutting.

"See," he said, "now I must pack it safe from knocks on the way up. How heavy should you say this was?"

Sabrina guessed twenty pounds.

"Nearer a hundredweight," he told her. It seemed unbelievable.

"That," she said, "brings back an old memory. The awful physical weight of the world used to be a nightmare to me when I was a child; it returns to me sometimes now, and causes a fearful depression to my spirits. I wonder what the connection is? The sensation used really to be poignant; a terror of matter as a sort of deity or demon, which held men prisoners."

"It is the deity I worship," said Reddie. He

drew down the cradle, adjusted its load, and began to haul. After some minutes of hard labour, a knotted loop came to hand. "Now it is at the top," he said, and, fastening the end firmly, rose. "Shall we go down now?" he inquired.

Sabrina blanched slightly as she once more looked down on the height up which she had come.

"No, no," said her companion; "don't look! that is the most fatal thing of all, until your eyes, like the rest of you, are in reasonable control. As you go down, think of me going up that rope; you will find it a tempering reflection under the circumstances."

He laughed, and she conceived that he had perhaps told her of that uncomfortable exploit for a definite purpose. She tried, and found that the ruse succeeded.

When her feet were once more on wet shingle, Reddie gave her a glowing look of approval.

"Now I will say something," he said, "that I would not say before. You have shown rare pluck. I know no other woman I would have taken where I have taken you. And," he added, "I know no other who would have gone."

"Do you mean it was really dangerous?" inquired Sabrina.

"Not to you," he answered; "to many it would have been. It was a matter of nerve, character—race." He laughed triumphantly at having made her demonstrate his theory. "Now, if you like, be angry with me!"

"Oh no," she answered. "Perhaps I too shall feel an increased self-respect if I can make myself believe that it was worth doing. What is the matter now?"

Reddie, looking ahead, said, "I fear I have been careless; I had not the tide-table properly in my head; indeed, I forgot altogether about it. We shall get through all right, but it will be at the cost

of a drenching. There is a good deal of wind on, and that makes a bigger tide; and there is practically no shore here except at low water. I am a bad guide, I fear."

Sabrina took the matter lightly. But he had told no more than the truth; she was wet to the waist before they got to a part of the cliffs where ascent grew possible. Arrived at the top, they directed their steps to the coastguard station, a row of squat cottages, with white-washed walls, and black roof and chimneys, half sunk like a fort in a trench of concrete, so that the window-sills lay well below the level of the ground; black doors and shutters completed the barrack-like aspect of a place which from its exposed position had already so little the air of home.

"Come," said Valentine, "I see plenty of smoke going up from that chimney. Mrs. Owens has a fire at all events; and I have no doubt she will be able to find some things for you to wear while your own are drying. Do tell me you forgive my having caused you this discomfort!"

"But it doesn't exist," said Sabrina, "not in any way that counts. I am really quite happy."

The blustering weather and her exertions had roused all her animal spirits — she looked animated and alert.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE WAY OF THE WIND

As they mounted to the head of the cliff, the wind, from which till now they had been partly sheltered, began to buffet them in force. Reddie had to give Sabrina his hand. "It looks as if we were in for a gale," he remarked. Over the sea a leaden sheet of gloom had begun to spread far out; the waves became edged with white.

Leaving his companion in charge of the coast-guard's wife, Reddie went to the signal-box, where the protruding snout of a telescope showed that some one was on duty within. Before long Sabrina received practical demonstration of what an increase of wind meant to a house at that altitude bordering on the sea. While changing her drenched garments and endeavouring to make herself as presentable as might be in those lent to her, she was startled by a sudden clapping-to of the shutters, which left her in almost total darkness. A minute later Mrs. Owens, entering with a light, explained that the shutters were thus closed to protect the glass from pebbles.

"Sometimes," she said, "we have to keep them fastened up for weeks; and then the back-kitchen is the only place with light in it. Often I daren't leave the house at all without first shutting them, unless there's some one here to see to it."

"You must have dreary times!" said her visitor.

"Yes, indeed, miss; though there's extra pay given, no one stays long at these hilltop stations.



My husband volunteered, but we are going to leave in June; and I don't fancy there'll be any one here after September when the new station's opened. My husband has only two other men with him now; the other married one went last autumn, and Mr. Reddie has the empty half here for his collections."

"Then do you housekeep for all of them?"

"Yes, I do, miss. It's not much trouble; the bachelors come in and eat with us, and Mr. Reddie is wonderful for the little work he gives."

"You must be terribly out of the world. How often do you get over to Wedport?"

"Only about once a month, miss. Every week a cart comes over with provisions, but in the winter I have to lay in supplies, and then the difficulty is to keep them. And the clothes too, and the linen, I have to air them every week regularly, else they all get mouldy."

It seemed to Sabrina that she had come to some remote place of exile, so slight was its contact with the outer world. She compared the seclusion of her own life at East Gill, and grew ashamed; it seemed by comparison to have all the resources of civilization at command. Yet in the summer, she thought, life here might be pleasant; it opened up to her mind possibilities for a student's life.

On issuing forth in dry apparel, she found Reddie awaiting her in Mrs. Owens' kitchen, and saw a tea-table already laid for four. A young coastguard got up as she entered, and started to leave the room.

"Would you prefer to have your tea here, miss?" inquired the woman.

Sabrina glanced at Reddie, not knowing what she ought to say.

"No," said he, "that will be putting every one else out for us; let it be in my workroom. Dan, don't go away."

He called back the silent coastguard, and led his

visitor across the passage shared in common by the two tenements. Entering his domain, Sabrina recognized familiar objects; Reddie had brought with him all his bird-stuffing tools and materials.

"The secret of life in a place like this," he remarked, in answer to her pleased comment, "is always to be occupied; then you find the unaccustomed freedom of loneliness delightful. I shall try to keep on here, even when Mrs. Owens leaves. Dan Curtis, that fellow you saw just now, has an actual liking for the place; it suits his mood of silence, and, living here together, he and I have become friends. While Mrs. Owens is making tea for us, will you come and look at these?"

He began to show her some fine specimens of plant-fossils which he had secured in the neighbourhood; and as they passed them from one to the other, it chanced that Valentine's fingers rested for a moment on hers: for a moment only, warm and strong. Then, speaking suddenly—

"Would you care to have this one?" he inquired, and with the question found excuse to bring their hands once more together. He spoke earnestly, "You would give me so much pleasure by accepting it."

"I thought they were not really yours," said Sabrina, coldly, withdrawing her hand.

"Oh yes; it is not as though I made a trade of it; and I have already many duplicates. Please, Miss Warham, I beg you not to refuse me!"

"If it is of value," objected Sabrina, "I would rather not have it. In any case, it can be of no real use to me, since I am not a collector."

"May it not have a small friendly value?"

"Your wish to give it to me is quite enough."

"Not for me," he said, with a look there could be no mistaking; but Sabrina had already turned away.

Reddie laid the specimen back in its place.

"Ah," he said, "I see that these things really

bore you." He pushed to the drawer. A moment later he had recovered himself, nor was there any subsequent change in his manner; but the incident was enough to disturb the serenity of his guest: she began to be ill at ease.

"How late this candle-light makes it seem," she said, speaking with forced composure. "I ought to think about getting back."

Wind and rain were audible through the shutter as she spoke.

"I fear," said Reddie, "we are in for some rough weather. Owens says it is blowing up for a gale."

Sabrina began to be apprehensive; with a gale coming on, she was either six or eight miles from home, and it was quite possible that the shorter way over the downs would be the worse choice.

Reddie went out, and returned presently with a face showing concern.

"I don't know what you will say to this," he remarked. "Owens says that you certainly cannot go back by way of the cliffs; he thinks it would be best if you let his wife give you a bed for the night. I will go over to East Gill and tell them that you are safe."

"Oh, I cannot let you do that!" cried Sabrina, dismayed. "I won't let any one be put to such trouble on my account. No; let me go at once, before it gets worse!"

She rose to her feet.

"But in any case I shall go with you," said Reddie.

Sabrina had now her reasons for not wishing his company, under such conditions.

"No, indeed!" she cried. "I am not so helpless that I cannot go alone."

"Yet I am too helpless to allow you," said Valentine; "the circumstances make it impossible. Don't you see that it can't be?"

Sabrina stood with knit brows, flushing, perplexed; a disturbed sense of what her mother would think was her chief concern.

Reddie watched her for a while in silence. "Look here, Miss Warham," he said at last, "you have proved that you have courage; now show that you are sensible, and don't let a simple miscalculation of the weather disturb you. If it is possible for you to go, you must allow me to see you home; if it is not, face the circumstance cheerfully, and stay here. We can certainly let your mother know in some way that you are safe, and that Mrs. Owens is looking after you."

Sabrina understood the considerateness of his last remark. Her vexation over the matter was not for herself; what people might think or say was very little to her. To Mrs. Warham it was almost everything; and the girl could not without a struggle give up her wish to conform to her mother's notions, and do what was most inconvenient and least reasonable.

"I must judge for myself first," she said at last. "If I find that I really cannot go, of course I must stay. Is it raining very hard now?"

The weather answered for itself, and Sabrina consented to wait and to take some food before attempting to start. But when an hour later she was again clad in her own garments, the sight of Mr. Owens entering the house like a man escaping from a mob should have been enough to keep her from the attempt. Nevertheless, she went out, and faced for a moment the rain-swept twilight, gathering its far ends for storm. She sought the help of Reddie's arm, took twelve steps, and turned about.

"I know it is useless now," she said, "so I resign myself." Indoors again, she said, "I did not know that wind could beat so hard as to cause actual fear. I felt a coward before it."

"Then you will let me go?" said Reddie.

"No," she answered, "you must not. It would be dark before you got clear of the downs, and I should have no peace for thinking what might have happened. Have they not a telegraph here? I remember seeing some posts as we came."

"Why, I never thought of it!" cried Reddie. "Yes, of course; for you are, I think, sufficiently within the definition of shipwrecked and stranded to have news passed for you officially; it can be handed on to the post-office at Wedport."

The message was sped. Reddie, returning, sent Mrs. Owens to light a fire and talk Sabrina into ease over her enforced detention. She could not help feeling that he was in all things scrupulously considerate of her comfort.

Though the house was strongly built, with walls nearly a yard thick, the force of the gale shook the chamber she was in; the outer shutters stirred as though strong hands were snatching to open them; and now and then great puffs of smoke from the newly lighted fire drove back into the room.

"It will settle down presently," said Mrs. Owens, and left her to make household arrangements.

A few minutes later Reddie returned. "Ah, that is right; I hope you have found books there to amuse you," he remarked, and crossed to his own work-table. "I am not now," he went on, "going to ask you to excuse me, if I just sit down and neglect you. You have had enough of my company, I am sure, for one day; and there is no reason why I should make myself a nuisance. That side of the room is for the present your home, and this is mine. I shall look in, if I may, to say good night; and Mrs. Owens is at your call." With that he buried himself in his work, seeming really to forget that she was there. He did not speak again for a couple of hours.

Sabrina was grateful for what other women

might have regarded as cavalier treatment; the sense of his presence wore away, and she read at last without self-consciousness in the solitude of her own thoughts. They met at the supper-table, and found plenty to talk about; then again retired into companionable silence till the time came for them to part.

"What have you been reading?" asked Reddie, when his guest was about to withdraw.

"Natural history," she replied, holding the book up. "I always do prefer fact to fiction," she added, half in apology, conscious that lighter literature had been put out for her to choose from.

"That is in keeping with your ideas about pets," answered Reddie. "I fear you have an abnormal love of truth. Some day you will put yourself to the torture over the dotting of an 'i' or the crossing of a 't.' I, on the other hand, am attracted to science because it is the most speculative and romantic thing I know; it is cram-full of the most colossal assumptions. Here is Mrs. Owens come to say she is ready for you."

Sabrina's sleep was sound; the wind hardly crept into her dreams at all, and before morning had sunk into stillness. A scratch at her door and a sweet whine of friendship were the sounds that roused her. She opened; Ron leapt in. It was then early morning. David had come over in the trap to fetch her before the world was abroad. He brought a note from her mother, with not a word in it of reproach, begging her to return with all speed. It contained a curious touch which first puzzled and then illumined her understanding.

"I have sent your little hand-bag; no one will know that you did not take it with you. Your telegram came *vid* Wedport."

Mrs. Warham had friends there to whom a short visit from her daughter had been owing. Sabrina's heart laughed. Respectability was saved by a hand-bag and a telegram *vid* Wedport!

## CHAPTER XXI

### LOVE AND MORALS

SABRINA remembered afterwards that, as they parted, Valentine Reddie's face had worn a cloud. She was too friendly in her regard for him not to wish, as far as possible, to give his mind ease; she felt that she owed him thanks. She wrote accordingly, expressing gratitude for his kindness, with a word of thanks also to Mrs. Owens for the trouble she had been put to. Valentine answered her letter by return as it were, in person. He seemed charged with matter for delivery, and had known where to find her.

"Have I offended you, Miss Warham?" was his direct inquiry, immediately upon their meeting.

"Offended me? On the contrary, you have been most kind."

"You say that out of politeness. I believe you have something against me in your mind."

"Oh no; you are mistaken."

"Then I wish you had; for, were it anything definite, I believe you would tell me. But somehow, without knowing it perhaps, you have become prejudiced against me."

"What makes you think so?"

"Even the way you speak now."

"Then there is no remedy; my disclaimer is of no use?"

"Ah," he cried impatiently, "don't let civil pretences stand between us! I thought we knew each

other better. Miss Warham, I think truly that you know what it is I wish to say."

"That I have offended *you*, I begin to fear," answered Sabrina.

"That would be impossible. I desire nothing so much as your friendship. Let me be sure of it!"

"That, I think, I can promise."

"Why, then, was I not allowed to bring you home the other day?"

Sabrina opened her eyes, and smiled at his apparent foolishness.

"Surely," she said, "the circumstances were very natural. How could my cousin's coming to fetch me back be a reflection on you?"

"I think it was meant so."

"Then I am sure you are mistaken."

"Will you tell me that you did not prefer his company to mine?"

"No; I will answer no such question!" replied Sabrina, with rising spirit.

"Yet you know why I ask it. Ah, now you are angry! And that I love you,—that also you know."

Sabrina shook her head, not with any thought of denying his words.

"Yes!" he said, and reiterated "yes!" again. "Is it an offence to you to be told that?"

"It is an affliction," she murmured. "I wished—I hoped——" She turned away her face. "It is such a disappointment," she said in troubled tone, "that you should ask more than I can give, when I am so willingly your friend."

"Will to be more!—it is only a matter of will. Let me win you! I only ask for time. At least, do not deny me the possibility; say that I may have hope!"

"Have no hope of me!" she told him. "My vow is to marry no man."

"Vows, like marriages," he replied, "need two to their making. Who has heard your oath?"

"Ah, do not mock me!" she cried. "I have



seen a few things too well, to think that I can ever change in regard to them: — marriage is one. I have a belief in friendship: in love of any other kind, none at all. Where that is concerned, I seem to have been disillusioned from my very birth. It is no joy to me to say this."

"Do you deny love entirely?"

"No; and yet to me it seems the great gamble of humanity. For I see that when men love they lose possession of themselves."

"Yes," said Reddie, "in order to rise to the possession of the higher."

"Ah, that is the fallacy! What human being — above all, what woman — has any right to accept the assumption that she is higher than another?"

"I did not mean that. I mean that two in one is essentially greater than one standing alone. That is a mathematical proposition; we are talking science. Spare me a few moments, — don't let us be merely 'friends' again yet! Remember I am a man pleading for my life!"

"Do not deceive yourself," said Sabrina; "your life is in your own hands, not mine. And what becomes of your mathematical proposition, if the result turns into a tug-of-war?" There was a sudden bitterness in her tone.

Her lover's gaze fell on her; he glowed in the contemplation of her beauty. "I look at you, and I say Sabra!" It was the natural man that spoke then.

Something in Sabrina's soul startled as she heard it. It at once repulsed and attracted her. That it was no argument, she knew. Yet it was a human voice thrilling deep with its emotions: "I look at you, and I say Sabra!"

"You are becoming a different person," she said uncomfortably, drawing a little back from him.

"Yes!" he cried; "yes! I can daub it no further! This is my one hour — mine, mine! Give

it to me! Make earth and heaven sweet to me for once, for a moment, that afterwards I may dream it was true!"

Sabrina was upon her feet. "Oh, my friend, stand up!" she said. "If you would not shame me, stand now!"

He too was up again, facing her. "Sabra, it is yes; it shall be yes!" he cried. His face drew close to hers. Violence and tenderness called on her to surrender.

She shook her head, closing her eyes.

"Ah! but I cannot take no!" he cried; "I *must* conquer you. You are for me, for no other man on God's earth!"

"I am for no man," she said; "for none."

"For me!" he affirmed, holding her.

"Release me, my friend," she breathed, her voice a ghost in her own hearing; "or does love make men cowards too?"

His hands fell from her at the word.

"Ah, beloved, how beautiful you are!" he cried. "Oh, light of my soul!"

He let her go from him then. She moved away, the heat of sudden anger still on her brow.

"So I have lost you!" he said in a voice of profound dejection and misery.

Her anger went. "No," she said, "I am your friend; I offer you all that I can give. Be wise; do not ask more!"

"Yet one thing more I dare, I do ask," he said.

"If you think it wise, name it." Her gentle tone showed her wish to make all possible concession.

"Only that you will give me the right once again to seek what you now refuse. Surely that is a little thing to grant?"

"A useless thing," she sighed, yet knew that to deny it would avail her little.

"Yet," he said, "it is like a promise of life to me now."

"If to live is to dream," she replied.

"I may dream?"

"If you must, I cannot forbid you. Let us say no more now!"

He took her words literally, and again she felt the gratitude which his conduct had the gift of winning.

"I must be going home," she said. "Will you come too?"

He declined gently, letting her go alone.

This was Valentine Reddie's first wooing.

Sabrina was too much of a woman to listen unmoved to a declaration of real passion. Nor could the man who had revealed to her so much of his inmost feelings remain quite the same object in her regard as formerly. She had declared to Valentine, almost as an accusation, that he had become a different person; but in herself also there began a subtle change, wrought not by any growth in her feelings towards him, but by his feelings towards her. The woman who finds herself loved breathes a different atmosphere, which changes the circulation of her blood, chilling or quickening it. She had been forced during the past weeks to listen to angry protestations of love from Ronald, protestations as devout as any of those she had just heard; and she had regarded them merely as phenomena in the troublesome growth of youth. But from a man like Valentine Reddie, of strong will, energy, and purpose, they came with a different meaning. His cry, in answer to her demur, "I look at you, and I say Sabra!" touched the profound springs of her emotions; it haunted her. Taught by that, she knew that over one man's heart she alone held sway, and that to him, deluded though he might be in the notion, life with her seemed to promise pre-eminent good. She considered his life, with all its interests, into which she could so readily enter; she thought of her own. In that direction a growing obligation seemed

to lie, to break from surroundings which threatened to change her identity, and bring her bound to earth. How little there was in reason to keep her tied! Even her mother was apparently willing to forego all claim on her, and was now anxious that she should seek work in some other sphere.

She was startled to find, on the day following Valentine's avowal, that her mother knew of it; the information had come directly. She could not reasonably reproach him for inviting her mother's countenance and aid; yet it made her own line of conduct more difficult. She began to suspect others also of knowing how matters stood; for the air of a small neighbourhood becomes quickly infected when such news is once started.

Lady Berrers, on the point of flight up to Town, came directly to the charge, as though secret information had reached her. She embraced the girl with even more than her usual affection, and barbed her arrows.

"My dear, when are you going to marry?"

Sabrina coloured under the friendly scrutiny, but could feel no offence; liberty of speech had become for Lady Berrers an established privilege.

"Indeed it is a thing I try never to think about," she answered; "nothing has recommended it to me in the past." She spoke so bitterly then, that Lady Berrers, knowing her history, was moved with tender compassion.

"Ah," she said soothingly, "forgive me! I do not ask out of vulgar curiosity; but for my own peace of mind."

"Yours, madam? Why should you wish me to marry?"

"For at least one very good reason that I may name — that nephew of mine will never settle down to anything while you live single. See how he runs after you! He is absurd, of course; but his desperation is quite genuine while it lasts."

"But he knows I can never take him seriously!"

"Oh, no doubt. Does that make him less forlorn? No, poor boy! his humility and vanity are most astonishingly mixed up. He is now solemnly bent on convincing you; and look at the antics he goes in for, in consequence! Do you know half the things he does, I wonder? No! that, my dear, is where I complain of you. Beauty has no business to be unconscious of its attractions. You have forbidden him to follow you about; does it prevent his lying in wait all day in the hopes of meeting you? If the night rains, or is foggy, or is in any other way unpleasant to be out in, that's the very night he must choose to stand at watch under your window. And there in the morning your cousin finds him, and they go off fishing together."

"What?" cried Sabrina, surprised at these absurd depths of a lover's folly.

"Yes; poor youth, he tells me everything. You seem not to know: yet he imagines that lately you have put a night-light for him, and lies till dawn watching it like a star."

Sabrina could not but laugh at love's labour so lost as this.

"It is Betty who sleeps with a night-light," she said; "she is afraid of the dark. She has had a cold lately, and we have exchanged rooms; her coughing disturbed my mother. She complained the other morning that a bouquet of roses fell on her pillow and woke her with palpitations; her window was open, though she was sure that the night before she had closed it."

"There, you see!" said Lady Berrers. "That's the stage of lunacy we have now arrived at."

"You tell me all this, dear madam," replied the girl; "but how am I to cure him? I do everything; I do nothing: but I can't help being myself." Troubled thoughts set Sabrina's lip quivering.

Lady Berrers loved her with a hostile eye. "My dear, marry!"

"I am to find a husband because Ronald can't behave sensibly? Indeed, madam, you give me some right to complain."

"When you 'madam' me, my dear, it means you are dishonest," retorted the lady. "Do you dare to tell me that you don't *know* there's a good man dying to have you at this moment?"

"I don't respect a man who 'dies' for what he can't get," said Sabrina, guardedly.

Lady Berrers came down on her sharply. "Anyway, that means you know who it is?"

"It means nothing of the kind; at least — it isn't true: nobody is dying for me. Why should you vex me by saying it?"

"Now, be angry with me because I'm your friend. Listen to me! I am not a match-maker, but I have had experience in men, and I know a good man when I see him; it's a gift of divination that comes with old age." She spoke boastingly, as one still consciously possessed of that which turns the laugh on time. "And I tell you, Sabrina, that to throw away a good man's love, either from pride or cowardice, is a perilous thing to do. You have a chance now of shaping your life to better ends than you have yet found for it. A thousand pities to miss that for a mere whim!"

Lady Berrers aimed well a remark which might have been taken as an undeserved slight by a heart less sincere. Few women care to be told that they lose worth in remaining their own idle property, but to Sabrina the thought constantly recurred; and here was one, whom she loved and respected, voicing her inmost sentiment. Yet, though the shaft struck home, it did so unwittingly in a wrong cause.

It surprised her, indeed, to hear so favourable an estimate of her unnamed lover set forth; for what chance had Lady Berrers of knowing him so well? Her own mind was less assured. He had a power which she dreaded as not wholly for good.

There was an attraction in him, at times a fascination, and yet her heart was opposed to it, and the fundamental prejudice was too deep to be easily overcome.

"I have so much reason to dread marriage," she murmured, reluctant of reference to the cause. "Who is there that one can really trust?"

"If you knew a little more of the world, my dear," said Lady Berrers, "you would find trust easier. It is the nature of most men to have had 'a past,' though it is to us that the term in its special sense gets applied, and we have to judge as we find them if it has left them tempered or dissolute. When you can see the curb in a man's character you may let the past go. It seems unfair to us, but so it is; a man remains good and trustworthy and honourable where, after like experiences, we should not have left ourselves a leg to stand on. Theories about equality of the sexes don't lead to happy marriages, Sabra. We are *not* equal. Man is above and below us, and we have just to do our best to fill the gap between—that is our place. Marriage is a sort of sandwich made up of humanity: man the bread and woman the relish. We are only the rib still, and we shan't get rid of our bone by gnawing it. It's no use being angry with Creation and the Book of Genesis, my dear."

Lady Berrers, be it remembered, thought she was pleading a good man's cause, and women in their pleadings are seldom quite honest. She had been through diplomatic training, and if in discretion she erred, in instinct she was right. She took Sabrina's hand, knowing that touch is often more eloquent than speech for a tale which deals with the emotions.

"I want," she said, "to tell you some family history. Yes; mine as well as yours. You know, of course, how the names of Lutworth and Lorry are joined in local prophecy; and having heard it

from my childhood and seen events, I am not ashamed to own that I have become superstitious —

“‘Till Lutworth give, or Lorry go,  
Lutworth and Lorry shall have woe.’

“There it is, stated. And we have had woe, my dear, enough of it in both families! Many have been born, and few have survived to see the future generation established; just enough of us live to keep the thing going. It is said to date back to some dispute about freehold; and a tradition of trespassing seems to have grown out of it— not on land only, I fear. There’s a good deal under the surface that I need not tell you of; but your uncle’s hostility to us would be a quaint contradiction if all that is said were true. And, then, even friendship doesn’t seem the remedy; it leads to trouble. Ronny makes friends with David—a Jonathan friendship; imitates him even in his walk, as I dare say you have noticed; and no sooner do you appear on the scene than he makes love to you. That, in spite of its absurdity, is why I am sometimes anxious. But you don’t *quite* know, and it is that I want to tell you; Ronny is too much like his father. Over him we had a great sorrow.”

Lady Berrers smoothed Sabrina’s hand in her own.

“Have you never heard?” she asked.

“Only what Betty happened to tell me once,” answered Sabrina. “It did not sound very probable.”

“Your mother has told you nothing?”

“I don’t think she has ever mentioned him.”

“No,” said Lady Berrers, “I suppose not; that is what I should have expected. Well, then, now I tell you; all that I, at least, know. My brother Ronald loved your mother too well. It was a madness—an obsession—terrible to witness, for I did witness it once. She never gave him encouragement, though, I think—no; I cannot be sure; I was never in her confidence. But once she came to



me for shelter—I cannot explain more, dear—and I had her sobbing in my arms till perhaps one or other of us slept. Do you know, she has never forgiven me for that; never spoken of it again! Soon afterwards she married your father: that is your dear mother's history. Remember, if her ideas of what is right and respectable seem now needlessly severe, that to maintain them she once went through fire."

"Ah! if I could only be of any comfort or use to her," said Sabrina, "it would make up for so much."

Her voice trembled. Fresh pity, as always, had sent fresh reproaches to her heart.

"I am sure your mother loves you," said her friend, meaning to give comfort.

"Oh yes," answered the girl, desolately, "we both love each other; that only makes it worse. We hardly share a thought."

"She is anxious for you; her life is not likely to be long, and her small annuity dies with her."

"Yes," said Sabrina.

"She would be reconciled if that load were taken off her mind."

"Reconciled?"

"To your marriage, my dear."

Lady Berrers had said her say; it was but one of the many influences all pointing for Sabrina in one direction. Some were insistent enough in all conscience, giving her no peace; Ronald's wooing was one of these. Stronger influences gave stiller counsel; her mother said nothing, yet seemed to wait for a word. One, the strongest, remained unconfessed, even to her own heart. Pride stood in the way.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A SURRENDER

BUTTERCUPS were abroad — "Farmer's money," to give them their local name among school children. A few days of rain had shot them into bloom, till distant fields of them shone like brass; even the gorse, now in full blaze, was not brighter; they set the tone to the whole district.

Old Farmer Lorry, at the sight of them, was seized with a sort of hay-fever, or land-hunger — a longing to go out and make final survey of the estate, and give a last curse to his neighbour's landmarks. Since his resignation of power he had not once been off the farm; he had, in fact, so nursed himself in decrepitude that it had become almost the object of his life: like St. Paul, he gloried in his infirmity, and whined amazing tunes to the creaking of his bones. But life had not been robbed of its zest so long as the old antagonisms remained; and, with its flicker of renewed energy, his mind woke to the fact that he had not for many months set foot in the family pew, or fixed eye during prayer on his enemy, the Squire.

Early one week he began ordering out the pony-carriage, to acquire a prescriptive right to it by the next Sunday; always, of course, choosing his time when the pony was most sure to be wanted for other work. Mrs. Warham, on the second day, received an embarrassing invitation to bear him company. Sabrina went down to see him and soften the inevitable word.

"Come yourself, then, Zabby, if you don't think you're too fine a lady," said the old man, and packed the stable-boy back to his work.

On the previous day Mrs. Willings had been coerced into driving, and, reduced to incapacity by the violence of his tongue, had run the chaise into a ditch. The Squire, coming on them in their predicament, had sent a man down the road to help them. This was bad; the humiliation of it still rankled.

Sabrina was less amenable to discipline than the housekeeper. "Take the reins yourself, uncle, or leave them to me!" she said, when he attempted to demonstrate.

He gave her a look of sour regard. "You got that from David, I suppose?" said he, desisting from his attempt.

"Got what?" she asked.

"That way of abusing an old man."

She did not trouble to answer. Ignoring her for a while, he talked to the crops, comparing their present low value with what it would have been in his day. Presently he came round again to his grievance.

"There goes David," he said, pointing. "Looks the master, don't he?" Then, going off into a growl, "Ay, ay, walking through it is better than going round it; teaches it who's master, that does! Well, I don't suppose I shall live to see it mowed."

"Why should you think that, uncle?"

"'Cause I'm not what I was!" he retorted. "Ill-usage ages a man."

It was best not to question old Lorry's conclusions — traps set for the unwary to fall into.

"You and David are coming it pretty thick together," he added, to show where rested the charge. "Oh yes, I've seen it all going on. I ha'n't got a leg to stand on now, have I?"

"I thought you were better," said his niece.

"Further on is better, I suppose, when it's an

old road past mending. There's David only waiting till I've got my back turned to undo everything. Ah, I know what he'll be after then! He's friends with that young scamp of yours, and I know what that means. Now, Zabby, if ever he goes to give away what isn't his to give, mind ye, don't let him! You say you want it—it's the right place for ye, if you only could see it. There ain't another woman like you in all the county; no, not even her ladyship, for all her smirking. You keep your place, you do! Lorry's Farm's the oldest house in the parish; we were old before ever they came into it. What am I talking of? Why, the pew, of course. Squire's wanted to turn me out for years. Well, I'm going to be buried in it, and he can sit on me then if he likes. We've a vault there, though it ha'n't been opened for generations, and that's where I'll go. Whatever he may do to David, he shan't turn out me!"

For the rest of that drive Lorry harped on the subject of his entombment. In this low-church Protestant yeoman the pagan spirit of St. Præxed's bishop found a strange echo. He worked with an object; playing on her pity, he extracted from Sabrina a promise that she would help him to church and stand by him on the following Sunday.

"It'll be the last time ye'll ever see me there, Zabby," said he; and though she knew how rancorous and false was his heart, she could not refuse to go with him. She looked forward to it as a penance.

Nor did Mrs. Warham escape her share of the discipline. Driving to church in the pony chaise at Brother Lorry's side, she experienced the greatest martyrdom she ever underwent for the faith: the old man did his best not to spare her.

Sabrina awaited her uncle's arrival in the church porch; he had taken care to be late. The congregation, having confessed its sins, had risen to sing when they made their entry. Old Lorry, with his

niece in attendance, and two sticks to hobble by, made the most of his opportunity. They advanced at a snail's pace, to a constant turning of heads. Halfway up the main aisle the farmer let one of his sticks fall with a clatter. Sabrina picked it up for him. He stood still, gave it a few admonitory thumps and went slowly on again. "Venite" was over and psalms were being said before they arrived at their pew. Sabrina all this while had been carrying her uncle's hat for him; he took it to pray into, exchanging it for a stick, returned it, and received the stick back again. Evil and deceitful old man! She knew well that this was his hour of triumph: for this purpose he had brought her. During the Litany she heard him joining audibly in prayer with the minister; and never before had the English Liturgy sounded so hateful in her ears.

Nor was her uncle Sabrina's only distraction from a right spirit of worship; if, on the one hand, she was prayed at, on the other she was being prayed to. Ronald, occupant with the Squire of the Castle pew, hung across the book-rest with pleading eyes, beseeching forgiveness of his sins. The seats were so arranged that she could not turn her back on him; only by shutting her eyes could she avoid seeing him. Readers curious to know the exact petitions made to do double duty on that occasion, may consult the book wherein they have their proper weight and meaning. The Squire, unaccustomed to hear the responses thus fervently delivered by any member of his family, however miserable or sinful, looked round on his grandson uneasily from time to time, in nervous dread lest a sudden conversion were about to take place in public and cause scandal.

Ronald had never enjoyed going to church so much. A feeling of goodness and exaltation came over him when he discovered that the well-spring of pure emotion lay in saying your prayers where

the beloved one could hear them. When seated, he could see only the top of Sabrina's hat; yet that alone was enough to make the vicar's sermon edifying. He wanted to cry "Hear, hear," so that the beloved might know how he also was listening; and he felt ready, if she really wished it, there and then to become a clergyman.

These searchings of a young heart are set down that the reader may know how much uncalculated good Sabrina did by going to church that day with her uncle. Love is a great power for good in the world, masters, when it takes us young enough!

Farmer Lorry, at any rate, received that spiritual sustenance which his soul craved. Sitting in sight of the congregation, in the seat of honour that had been his father's before him, he faced his enemy from the old vantage-ground for the last time. The stare of non-recognition with which men meet to worship a common Maker can be used effectively, if we know how; but the eye of a stiff-backed aristocrat takes a lot of catching, and to have our own right facial expression all ready and waiting makes the exercise exhausting. By the time Farmer Lorry had seen the service through and reached home again, he was a worn-out man. Indomitable courage made him slow to own it. Having made his piety a rod to the backs of others, he fell to dinner with a more zealous appetite than his weak condition warranted, and collapsed for the rest of the day into comatose slumber.

Sabrina also felt a sense of reaction after the trying experiences of the morning; and, as soon as the midday meal was over, she went out to seek a restorative in solitude. She had not gone far when Valentine Reddie overtook her.

"I saw you in church this morning," he said, as a sort of explanation of their meeting. She was glad she had not seen him.

"Do you go often?" she asked him.

"'I'm afraid not' is, I suppose, the correct

answer," he replied. "No, I go seldom. And you?"

"I went to-day to please my uncle."

"Ah! I went experimentally."

"Successfully, then, I hope."

"Yes; for I saw you there."

Sabrina was silent.

"I am going away," he went on, "so I wished to say good-bye. May I walk with you a little way?"

She consented, and they strolled on together in an upward direction. To the left a blue horizon of water, seen through the cleavage of the downs over Amesbay, mounted beside them; land-view gave way more and more to sea-scape.

"I have something," said Valentine, "that I wish to tell you. It may not interest you, and yet, again, it may; in any case, after what has passed between us, you have a right to know."

"Anything that concerns you for good, interests me," she replied.

"Well, it is not exactly for good, unless you take that view of it. Since I last saw you I find that I am more wholly dependent on my own exertions than I knew. I had, until the other day, a small settled addition to my professional income. A claim has now come which I have to meet, and which leaves me a poorer man than I was when we last talked. The work on which I am engaged does not bring me in a large income; and now the chance has come for me to join a scientific expedition to South Africa. It has its hazards — those of course are part of the reckoning, and are paid for: the work may take me away for two years, and I must decide within the next fortnight."

"Yes?" said Sabrina, understanding well enough how this concerned her.

"To-morrow I go to London to see the authorities, and learn all particulars — if I decide to go."

"Yes," said Sabrina, again.

"Well," he said, "if I do, I leave no one behind to regret me. Even if I go, not to return, I have no one to put on the conventional mourning for me; I am just a name cast loose into the raffle of life."

"You have no relatives?"

"I know of none. I wanted to tell you this too: I do not bear my father's name—do not even know who he was. My mother—you understand—what wrong was done to her happened before my day. I know little about it."

Sabrina turned away from him the trouble of her face. How often, in some form or another, was she to meet this apparition of wrong which was at the root of her fear; the war of sex against sex smoothed over by staid conventions of society, and all the time so near the surface? In every life she came on traces of it; and now on this man also, whose friendship was pleasant to her, but whom as a lover she feared to trust—on him also lay the mark of wrong; he, too, was a sufferer from the misdoing of others. It did not, as those who have read her character may guess, count against him in Sabrina's heart.

They reached the head of the down; earth and sky lay open before them. She turned and looked at him with a glance of compunction and solicitude.

"Why did you tell me this?" she asked.

"I wished you to know everything."

"To know! Ah yes; to know is one thing. If one could only understand!"

"Understand what?"

"More, oh, far more! Life, myself, things in general—where right lies; and the key to it all!"

"Surely right," said Valentine, with a cheery philosophy characteristic of him, "is in the way we take things. Life is diversified enough in all conscience; there has been some folly in mine, as there is bound to be in every man's who tries to live; and



yet in a way I feel that I have gained wisdom as the result. There is one thing I know for certain, and it is a good one for setting the mind free from cobwebs."

"What is that?"

"That one pays for everything one takes out of life; and what one pays is the right payment, no more and no less. I don't say it as a moral, but for an actual fact. We need not trouble ourselves to right the balance for saint and sinner; it's beyond us, and done without our help. Reward and punishment are being measured out now to each one of us for what we or our fathers have done. When lovers meet and part, when the love of husbands and wives grows cold, when the wise die and when fools live on — retribution is there, though we may not know it."

"Somehow that seems terrible, that we should be the victims of causes of which we know nothing."

"Is it not just? We sin, as you call it, also without knowing."

"No, that can never be!"

"Conventional theology says no; life tells a different tale. We love also without knowing it; we wake up and find devil or angel already in possession of us; and when we do we are already past escape."

"Ah, I wish ——" cried the girl, but she let the thought rest unuttered.

"Yes; what is your wish?"

"That before trying to possess others we tried to possess ourselves. Without that, love seems to be more a weakness than anything."

"Perhaps it is a weakness, till it is made strong. 'Out of the eater comes forth meat,' says the Scripture." Valentine laughed a little scoffingly over the words.

"It seems a fearful hazard!" she objected faintly, anticipating what she now knew to be near.

"No," Valentine insisted, "there is no real hazard in all the world. Nothing you or I can do will alter what waits for us. We can deal with the present as it finds us; Fate does the rest. I can only think of one thing now; my brain is full of it. If strength is your ideal, do you think either of us will be stronger, when at your bidding we have drifted apart? Does life here offer you so much, that you will risk being a coward for the sake of it? You see I don't flatter you as some lovers would."

"No, never do that!" she said.

"And yet," he replied, "and yet I have merely to speak the truth." His eyes fell on her with the appeal of devouring passion. "Ah! how beautiful you are!"

She was silent. He said again, "How beautiful you are, Sabra!"

"If you really think so, I suppose I ought to be glad."

"On my soul I do! Yet, why should you be glad?"

"That I have anything about me that can give pleasure."

"And pain!" he urged; to her further silence repeating, "And pain, Sabra!"

"Then I am sorry."

"Again, why?"

Her brow grew ruffled. "Because it is so disproportionate," she objected. "Why trouble so much over a thing that one holds on a ten, perhaps only on a five, years' lease? What can that by itself be worth?"

"For that," said Reddie, hot with conviction, "to have you mine for five years only, for one, I would give my whole life!"

"It is so easy to offer a thing whose value is unknown to you, for another thing whose value is also unknown," replied Sabrina, rather bitterly. "You mean merely that you would give to-day and

to-morrow, and the day after, and risk the rest. That is what a man means when he says his 'life.'"

"I would give my soul!" cried Valentine.

"You have no right to give that."

"Yes; for with you it would be safe!" He sighed stormily. "With *you*, Sabra."

"Ah, how am I to believe you at all?" she answered, with doubt in her tone. "Did you not begin by deceiving me?"

"Deceiving you? How?" inquired Valentine, a little startled.

She was recalling their first encounter on the very down where they were now standing.

"When we first met," she said, "you asked me the way. Was not that deception?"

"If to conceal one's thoughts be deception—yes. For I did not, at that first meeting, say what I thought—what indeed I knew—that I had at last met my fate."

"No, but you wished me to think you were a stranger to the place, and so you asked me the way; yet I had seen you cross the barrow almost every day for a fortnight before that."

"You had?" Reddie smiled at her in triumph.

"Then if I am to be so honest, be honest yourself. You did not then tell me that you had seen me here before, that you knew we were likely to meet, that you had wondered who it was that came by this path every night and all weathers. Yet that was the full truth."

"I told no falsehood."

"Nor I; I merely asked a question."

"Hardly a necessary one."

"Most necessary in order that I might exchange words with you. If I had stopped you, and said, 'You are the woman I am destined to love,' it would have been true; but would you have stayed to hear more?"

Sabrina meditated. "I don't fancy I should have

run away," she said at last, smiling at the scene his words suggested.

"Yes, you would—like a rabbit! You are ignorant of yourself, and the strength of the conventions that hound you down, if you think otherwise."

Sabrina wondered if this indeed were true; why should open speech put any one to flight?

"I am very ignorant of myself," she confessed,—“of most things. I have found that out.”

"That is the way women are brought up," said Reddie.

She did not answer; her eyes said, "Now you seem to be talking sense."

Reddie pursued his advantage. "You see, Sabra—I must call you 'Sabra'; it is by that name that I think of you night and day—the most honest man in the world is still bound by the manners of the age he lives in. The very fact that we wear clothes, that we are man and woman, is the beginning of hindrance to free speech. No woman hears a man speak naturally of things—until she is married. You—you are putting me to the rack and torture now—you beautiful cold statue! Do you know what a man is? Do you think you know anything?"

"I know—a little." Her thoughts were upon the tragedy of her mother's married life.

"There is the danger!" exclaimed Valentine. "You live in a corner, and hug your little as if it were the summing up of all wisdom! What is it? Can you put it into words?"

"I have told you already; I distrust men—it seems to me that when they love they deceive."

"They have to! Where is the woman they dare tell the truth to?"

"Let them, at least, wait for the woman they dare not tell a lie to! Until then——"

"Poor celibates all!" cried Valentine, and broke

off quickly to say, "I have not lied to you, Sabra. To you I will tell the truth."

"Shall I be so much the exception, then?" she asked a little scornfully.

He replied, "You are the only woman I have ever loved."

"Ever *loved*?" There was suspicion in her voice as she said that.

"To other women——" he paused, eyed her sharply, and let the word go. "To others I have——lied."

"I can believe it so well," said Sabrina, and said it with no scorn or bitterness of tone, only with an infinite weariness, as of a tale that has been already told. "You wish me to believe you, I suppose?"

"I wish you to know the truth," he said, and eyed her as a gambler the losing hazard of the game.

"Go on," she answered, "you are teaching me more than I know."

"Oh, Sabra!" cried her lover, "don't turn your eyes away from me. Look! judge me with your eyes—not your thoughts only, and I will bear it. Listen, I will talk sense and truth to you, as never man did to the woman he hoped to win; yes, though you may scorn and cast me off for a reward. A man, as soon as the stuff of life is in him—what does he do? This; he casts round him for his mate that is to be. You may think it isn't so; you see him at his work, at his play, money-making, pushing his way, driving his energies hard, with a thousand and one interests—and most of you women jealous of them all. But underneath it all he is straining—a poor, fiery driven drudge of an animal—for the one thing needful to body and soul—his mate, I tell you, his mate!"

"Am I to say, 'Poor beast!' now?" asked Sabrina.

"Yes, say that—say anything! You, oh, you good women, you stand on your pedestals and

mock! What do you know? With you it is different; you grow up, you come to womanhood; does what 'being' means trouble you at all? Have you ever given it a thought? Are your souls tied to the 'poor beast' within you, as a man's is tied? Is it to you in your cold independence and your tantalizing use of the beauty Heaven bestows on you—is it to you we can tell the truth all at once? You judge us with foreign hearts: it is simple necessity that drives us to speak to you in a strange tongue."

"Is it in that strange tongue you are speaking to me now?" she inquired, wondering to hear him, doubting the sense of his words.

"Yes, it is! Try how I will, I cannot tell you the full truth—unless, Sabra, unless you will stoop down from your height and take me in your arms."

His voice thrilled; surrendering all attempt at self-justification then, he lay at her feet, looking up into her face.

She made no movement towards him, but sat looking out over the bare head of down to the distant sails of a blue and motionless sea. Valentine bowed his face to the turf.

"Oh, Sabra, Sabra, Sabra!" he cried in thick utterance; and spoke no more.

Divinely, compassionately, her hand sought and touched his. Out of a creed not her own, her heart found words to express its weakness—the weakness to which nearly every woman so taxed must finally succumb.

"Mother Mary, pity women!" she said; and did not know how great her own need was then.

The silence endured till gently she drew her hand back from his. He woke at separation from her touch.

"Sabra?" he said.

She was silent.

"Sabra?" he cried again.

Still silence hung over him.

"I do go away to-morrow," he said.

Once more she reached out her hand to him ; but the compassion of her words was now as much for her lover as for herself.

"Don't go!" she murmured, in a tone of resignation, almost of regret ; "not if you care to stay."

Thus she was won.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE DAY AFTER

MRS. WARHAM gave thanks to Providence in tears when she learned the news. It brought relief to her mind in more ways than one; added to the comfort of knowing that her daughter's future was now provided for, she had no longer to fear for her either a romantic entanglement or a misalliance. The last was what she had most feared, in view of Sabrina's breach of the domestic barrier which she herself had so carefully raised; and in her long clinging embrace the daughter was taught to read gratitude for favour bestowed, receiving thanks rather than felicitation over the step she had taken.

Mrs. Warham was anxious to have ocular proof that the thing she had longed for had really come about, insisting that Valentine should, for a few days at least, leave his work, and come into the neighbourhood. She wished, in fact, to publish it, depriving Sabrina of the hope that her engagement might for a few days at least remain her own concern. She was thus brought face to face with a duty she could no longer postpone, that of anticipating, in the quarter where it would strike deepest, the news of her coming marriage. To that heart of silent loyalty she could not hope to lessen the pain; neither could she imply by any word her knowledge of the unspoken truth; yet she could not allow the news to reach him in such a way as to suggest carelessness or indifference on her part.

With her mind set to the task, she went out in



search of her cousin at an hour of the afternoon when he was usually to be found at the stables. This was on the Monday. Passing to the back premises she did not notice that the dog Ron was following her. To cross the garden she turned in through a high iron gate, shutting it behind her, a precaution necessary to keep out poultry. There she saw, seated in a chair upon the grass plot, her uncle, apparently dozing. Anxious not to waken him, she stepped lightly across the turf; as she passed, she noticed that his eyes were open, his jaw a little dropped; a small green grub was crawling across his face. In a flash came the horrible conviction that the figure before her sat unable to move, helpless to lift a hand; the eyes alone told her that he was alive. She called aloud for help, and ran to his side, crying—

“Oh, uncle, what is the matter!”

The gate rattled sharply behind her; then an appalling cry smote upon her ears; the air grew full of it; echoing walls beat back the sound. “Ron, Ron!” she cried, and turning about, saw him caught fast, impaled on spikes of iron. He had leapt at her cry, and now hung struggling, desperate still, to get to her. There was a shout, and the sound of some one running swiftly up the yard. Sabrina sprang to the rescue, and took upon her breast one-half of that load of anguish. Hands from the other side were helping her; over the bloodied and writhing body of her favourite she saw David’s face.

“Go to your father!” she cried, receiving the whole burden; “leave this to me! Oh, my poor Ron!” She knelt clasping him, for he struggled to escape—folded her skirts over him like a shroud, endeavouring to staunch the blood. David quitted her side; she saw Mrs. Willings run by, followed by two maids. “Fetch water!” she said to one of these, crying, “Go; don’t stare!” when the white-faced girl delayed, turning her head from side to

side over the double horror of the scene. In another moment she saw old Lorry borne by in his son's arms. At the dog, and Sabrina, and the bright blood-stains the eyes stared from a face fixed and stark; just in the same way they stared at the gay patches of colour in the flower-beds bordering the lawn.

Long afterwards she remembered that face of staring indifference as it looked at her across David's shoulder while borne away to the bed from which it was never to rise. Even in that moment of her own grief the piteousness of the thing knocked at her heart, saying something then that she had not heard said so plainly before. Strange that it should have happened to-day! She saw David carry his burden indoors, and turned again to the poor maimed life struggling and crying in her arms.

The maid came, bringing a bucket and cloths: let it go with a clatter, and fell back faint against the wall.

"Oh, miss, you are bleeding!" she gasped.

"No," said Sabrina, and did not know it. She bade her wring out a cloth, and began bandaging. "Send me a man!" she said presently, finding the girl helpless. "Quick, you can at least run!"

The maid sped on her errand. A moment later David ran up the yard; she heard a clattering of hoofs from the stables, and saw him ride off. Not a word had passed between them; but in little more than an hour doctor and veterinary arrived together. Ron was carried to a bed of rugs made up for him in the painted parlour; it was possible that he might recover. The report from upstairs gave no such hope for the old man; he might linger on a few months, or a year — two years was an outside limit — after a while he might regain his speech, not the use of his limbs. Catching sight of Sabrina's face, the doctor ordered her to bed; she obeyed to the extent of lying down dressed. Betty came and

removed some of her garments as she lay, for once not scolding her; she scolded the dog, till her mistress imposed silence.

Left to herself at last Sabrina lay pretending that she would sleep; but close her eyes, divert her thoughts as she would, she saw always the old man's face blank and meaningless looking at her over his son's shoulder; and David carrying him lightly and tenderly, as though he were a little child; and when at last reaction came after the long strain, and she wept miserably, turning her face to the pillow to deaden the sound of her cries—it was not for Ron, not for her uncle, nor for her cousin that the tears fell. She wept as one without pride; and yet it was to pride that, as she looked forward, she clung now; it was pride under the disguise of virtue that made her refuse to look back.

At a late hour, gazing out into the night, she saw, upon the grass plot below, a square of light coming from a window on the ground floor. She knew which it must be; all the rest of the house lay in darkness, save that the room, where her uncle lay, showed a faint glimmer of consciousness like that of the sick man himself. If there was watching to be done, she felt that she ought to share it. With Ron, at all events, she was individually concerned, her own act having caused his injury. She descended the stairs, and, making her way to the parlour, found her cousin sitting bent under the lamplight alone; across his feet lay the wounded deer-hound, stiff, and bandaged like a mummy. Laying a hand on his arm—

“Why don't you go to bed, David?” she inquired.

Till then, he had been unaware of her presence. A book fell to under his hand; he started, and rose with a flushed look, as though roused from slumber or deep reverie.

“I'm on duty to-night,” he said.

“But why should you be? I can look after Ron,”

"Up there, I mean," he answered.

The upward jerk of the head indicated a double attendance.

"Then go up at once," said Sabrina; "I will stay down here."

"There's no need," he answered. "I've just been; it's only to go in and look at him from time to time; he's asleep now."

"And when will you sleep?"

"I'm to call up Mrs. Willings at a quarter to three."

"Will you promise to go to bed then?"

"Ay, if I'm tired I will. Don't you trouble about me, Sabra."

"But I must: at least, while I am here," she said, approaching what was upon her mind. Glancing round this room of quiet recollections, her eye fell on books still lying on the mantel-shelf. "Why, David," she said, "what a long time it is since we last met here; summer weather seems to have put a stop to all our readings."

"Yes," he answered, "I suppose it's that; there's less time for biding quiet nowadays. So happens I was reading a bit before you came in."

"Do you go on reading, then?" she asked, with a sort of compunction, for it was rather as a result of her own private judgment than of his increasing occupation that their readings had terminated. It was at least three months now since they had last met for the purpose.

"Yes," he replied; "I do generally read now when I've the chance."

She took up the closed volume that lay at his elbow, saying—

"How far have you got now?"

It fell open between her hands as she spoke; a small blue ribbon marked the page. Recognizing it, her eyes grew dim.

"Yes; that's where I am," said David.

"Let us read a little now!" she said, and passed

him the book. "Show me up to where you have read."

He returned it, pointing to the passage; the ribbon was then out of sight.

Sabrina sat down, and, lifting the book to her face, began reading; before she had finished a sentence, she laid it down again: it was best to get the thing over at once. A faint moan from Ron, recognizing her voice, and inviting sympathy, gave her an excuse to bend down, and avoid her cousin's eyes while speaking.

"David, do you know that I am going away soon?"

"I didn't know," he answered; "but I didn't expect otherwise."

"You expected me to go?"

"I never thought of your staying—it seemed too unlikely. Why, it has been almost a year already, though it hardly seems so long."

"No; time has run on so quietly. Now my life is going to be quite different—formed altogether on a new plan. I am going—to change my name."

She shrank from putting the news in more direct form, and now, faint at heart, sat waiting, wondering what he might have to say to her.

"That's a big change; to be sure," he remarked, in an even contemplative tone, as though some weighty calculation occupied his mind. "So it's settled, is it?"

"That I am going to marry Mr. Reddie," she said in a low voice—"yes."

There was a dead pause.

"Does the news surprise you very much, David?" she inquired timidly, when the silence grew difficult to bear.

"Oh no," he said, "not so much. There's nothing to surprise one, when one thinks about it. No; it seems quite natural now you've told it."

These seemed cold words; she waited to hear more.

"I wished to tell you of it myself, David," she said, when waiting proved vain, "because I value your friendship and your good opinion so much. There is no one here I owe so much to as I do to you. Will you not say you wish me joy?"

"Ay," said her cousin, "I do that, you know I do."

"And what may I wish you, David, in return? Here is trouble and sickness in the house, and I shall be leaving you with all that extra care and responsibility. It seems unfair that I can claim none of it, when you, by your thought and kindness, have done so much for me. When I first came here it seemed like a prison: and now I have begun to love the place; yes, I believe I shall be sorry to go. You have helped to make it home. Can I say a better word for it than that—I, who in all my childhood, never had one?"

"Well, I hope you'll always make it home," replied David, heartily. "Here it is, whenever you wish; there's more room in it than we are ever likely to want. When do you say the marriage is to be?"

"We have hardly settled that yet; these are early days. Mr. Reddie—Valentine—wishes it to be soon—'before the heather is over,' he says, and then he plans taking me abroad with him."

"Oh ay; that'll suit you fine!" said David, remembering the wish she had once expressed.

"Yes," said Sabrina, "it is indeed something to look forward to."

Yet her anticipation was not so glad as it should have been; she could no longer view the future without some feeling of regret for the past. For almost a year she had been in this place, and had found by degrees that it had interest, physiognomy, and life. Looking at it first with dull or discontented eyes, she had come gradually to feel its power, even its danger; it had oppressed her with a growing sense of bondage. Now at last when

the die was cast and the danger removed, she saw it in a truer light: the light of a tender regret. Yet the place remained what it always had been, what, thanks to its remoteness from the world, it might always hope to remain. It was she herself who had changed; how changed, she had not realized until these last few days, until, that is to say, she had decided to cast her lot in another sphere.

"You will always live here, David?"

"Ah, I suppose."

"Even if you had your choice, you would never think of going elsewhere now, of doing anything different?"

"It's too unlikely to think about," he answered.

"Well," she said, "I hope you will not, and I did not always think that. You and the place seem to belong to each other now; when I think of it, it will always be with you here, indoors and out, having an eye to everything, directing all that goes on. I have come to think that the simplest solutions of life are the best, and to envy those who can order their own lives accordingly; they want for little. The people who are really in want are those for whom the world is too small, people who are restless and discontented, as I have been. You, David, are the most contented man I know, and so I have come to think of you as the wisest."

Her cousin stared at her with a quiet, speculative gaze.

"Ay," he answered, "I suppose I've as much cause as most men to be contented, in reason. Will you mind," he added, "biding alone here for a bit, while I go up and see if my father wants for anything; that is, supposing you meant staying for any time. I'm sorry to go, and seem so rude."

He left the room, and Sabrina sat intending to await his return; but in the solitude of her own thoughts grief rose unbidden. Before she knew, her eyes were overflowing with tears, and her

breast was heaving in the effort to control an emotion which she could not explain. She told herself that she was overwrought by the events of the day, and therefore not behaving sensibly; and the more she assumed this to be the reason, the less it helped her to become calm.

At the sound of his returning step in the small lobby, unable to let her face be seen, she escaped by the other door; standing in the passage without, she bade him good night, and heard in his quiet answer no note of disappointment or surprise at her sudden desertion of his company. She passed upstairs to her own room, but did not sleep till the twitter of birds in the early dawn told that the long night-watch she had been sharing was over.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### CREATURE COMFORTS

RONALD LUTWORTH was missing. Leaving behind him scattered traces of a state of mind unanswerable for its actions, he had taken, to all appearances, a despairing dive out of existence. Farewell tips to the servants, mementoes to friends, all ticketed with their names, and a bed that had not been slept in,—these were a few of the tokens he had left behind as evidence of the irrevocable nature of his flitting. Short of finding a suit of clothes lying derelict on the shore, his family had sufficient material given them for imagining that the disappearance was final. Lady Berrers, however, knew her nephew better than he knew himself; and the letter which brought word of his disappearance contained a far greater shock for her. Sabrina had been made the recipient of his farewell message to civilization, to love, to life, to human intercourse, to religion, to the virtues, to everything apparently but tobacco; from the amount of the fragrant weed which he had carried away with him, scrupulously selecting the better blends, it was evident that smoke was the chosen medium of his dissolution. Informed of these resolves, Sabrina transmitted to the Squire as much actual news of him as she could disentangle from the nonsense of his griefs. To Lady Berrers, absent in Town, she wrote more openly, her letter serving a double purpose.

“Ronald has heard,” she sent word, “that I am engaged to be married—I hardly know whether this ought to come first or second—and has gone into hiding in order to establish a crisis. I hope you will not feel anxious. I reason with myself trying not to be, and do at times succeed, though he declares we may expect to hear of him again ‘when the sea gives up its dead,’ and suggests no earlier date for his reappearance. The note came in through my window tied on to a bunch of passion-flowers, and it was a beautiful morning,—which all helps me to feel about it as I think you will; but the page was much blotted, and I fear the poor boy was really unhappy while he wrote it. It makes me miserable, in spite of myself, though not deeply anxious or alarmed. In telling you this I have told you my other news,—what you have long been wishing and asking for; I am to be married to Valentine Reddie before the summer is over. My mother is glad, as I know you will be; but I want to hear that you forgive me as regards Ronald; and then I shall feel free to write about my own concerns. The Squire is angry with me, holding me responsible for the loss of his best cigars, of which Ronald has made a clean sweep. That is really what decides me not to be anxious; but until he returns to make restitution I am to be shut off work, if I may judge from the locked doors that greeted me this morning on my arrival. Every day that goes will add to my offence, for of course Ronald is smoking them somewhere, and I can get no clue as to his whereabouts. Pray for me a little, dear madam, not about this at all; but that the future may give happiness to deserving hearts to which I may have brought pain. You will let me see you once again, I hope, before I cease to be

“SABRINA WARHAM.”

Thus abruptly ended a letter which Lady Berrers dropped when halfway through its perusal,

and resumed only with a stunned sense that things had gone very wrong indeed.

As a cover no doubt to the real cause of lamentation, she wrote reproachfully of Ronald's last vagary.

"No, I am not anxious in the least, but angry—more angry, my dear, than I like to say. You have been proud and stupid and blind—wilfully blind; I discover that you are incorrigible, and have moments of wishing that I did not think you lovable. Yes; I pray that you may be happy, and for all deserving hearts; and I think the prayer will be needed. Please find Ronald for me! Meanwhile I am sending the Squire a present of cigars, having far more consideration for your interests than you deserve."

Sabrina read in this missive the anxiety which the lady denied. In her wish to restore the youth to his home she went to David for advice; did he know where Ronald might be found?

David's gaze turned sea-wards; he admitted that he had a notion.

"Are you under any promise not to tell?"

"No, I've not seen him at all to speak to."

"But you did see him?"

"No, I didn't; but the small canvas boat has gone and hasn't come back: if he took it, I reckon I know where to lay hands on him."

"Could you take me?"

"Yes, if you wish; not just now, though. We could do it to-morrow morning on the tide. Can you be out early?"

"Any hour you like to name."

"I mean five o'clock in the morning."

"Then I mean it too," she answered. "Where is he?"

"Maybe I'm wrong," said David. "My notion is he's out yonder."

He pointed over the sea towards a dark speck now scarcely visible, at night a known beacon,

marking for mariners a dangerous shoal six miles off shore, where the spool's current ran fiercest.

"You really think he is there, then?"

David nodded. Sabrina began smiling to her thoughts.

"When we go," she said, "we must take plenty of food with us. He's a dear foolish boy, but never was any one more human. That is why he has to run away; it helps him to remain absurd more comfortably. When I am gone you will look after him for me, won't you, David; and make him be sensible? He couldn't have a better object-lesson than you."

David looked at her, and slowly the colour mounted to her face. He had acquired, she knew not how, the power of making her blush.

"I'll see he doesn't disgrace himself," said David, speaking in a queer tone, half to himself.

They were out together the next morning at the appointed hour, and caught the sun low down upon the sea. David made his companion eat biscuits before starting.

"You think yourself a good sailor," said he; "you'll find you are mistaken if you come off shore at this time of day without eating."

Standing out from the land they fell in with a keen sea-breeze; Sabrina steered while David handled the sail.

"You will find it a bit sharp; I ought to have brought you some wraps," he said, and gave her a coat to put over her shoulders. At first she refused it, but was glad of it as they drew more out into the open bay.

The sea was lively, soft and glittering to the eye; in movement and colour and sound it conveyed the impression of youth, of high health, of jollity. The waves capered ahead of them, romped back, slapped hard on the gunwale of the boat, ducked, and swung away; came roguish and contrary, and fell off chuckling and bobbing by the stern. A

million needles of fire danced on the eastern wave; sea-birds circled and hovered, swinging alternately to shadow and sun for a morning bath in the light. One or two of them dropped in the boat's wake to swing with the tide; and as she watched them Sabrina became aware at what speed wind and sea were carrying her on. Far astern the shore began to unfold like the opening fingers of a hand, reach after reach of cliff, inlet, and point and jagged archway of storm-hollowed rock, a changing flattening perspective, drawing slowly away from the eye, giving full face in exchange for profile. Gradually colour took the place of form, a long undulating line of grey cliff, broken here and there by green hollows, reared a cold obstruction between the eye and the familiar inlands. To Sabrina it was as though she saw for the first time some stretch of foreign coast; and yet she had often stood above those naked rocks and gazed sea-wards, knowing nothing of their warder-faces, their scars, their huge dismemberments. The small sand-martins that lodged in the cliffs, the rabbits that ran on their higher terraces, knew more of them than she did; and the sense that she had been living all this time behind a closed door struck her again with fresh force. Her eyes ranged east and west over the long line of sea-wall.

"This is England!" she murmured in reverie, and wondered was it thus that foreigners learned of her, feeling rebuffed by the high arrogance of her sea-ward visage, having never known the soft melting mood of her green fields, the memorial peace of her homesteads, and the slow cow-like placidity of the British race when it turns to the tilling of its own fields. She was beginning to feel that this peace-loving disposition was the fundamental quality in the building-up of England's empire; that at the root of all her adventurous and fighting blood was this quiet faculty for shaping a field out of rough ground, for finding pasture in

the wilderness, and wherever field and pasture—there a home, and rest for her migrant breed.

Sabrina's eye turned with her thoughts to David, sitting there so near her. Yes, he was, as he had once said, "English enough" for all the touch of foreign that lay in his origin. Blood, like bread, is one of England's free imports, and she absorbs it to make Englishmen. Here was one of them, and he too, like the land of his birth, had a sea-face to show. At the taste of the brine his pastoral look went, and that touch of the bird of prey, which Sabrina had noted in him, grew strong. She endeavoured to trace it out, and found it less in the face than in the glance; it was keenness, not predatory instinct, the hawk's eye, not his talon or his beak, which gave the look she admired; she saw in it a high aloofness, an unconcern in things near; horizons seemed rather to be its aim.

Prompted by the thought, "Can you see far, David?" she inquired.

"About as far as most," he said.

"Then you can see the light-ship?"

"And some one on it," he answered. For Sabrina it still lay invisible behind morning haze and the toss of waters.

"Any one you can recognize?"

"I'm not sure."

A few minutes later he faced about and said to her, smiling—

"You come under the sail and let me go aft." Clearly his eyes had told him something.

"Oh yes, it's him right enough!" he nodded in answer to her interrogating glance. "They don't wear white flannels on board light-ships as a rule, I reckon."

Before long Sabrina could herself distinguish a lively figure bobbing industriously to and fro on the light-ship's deck. The great strong tub, with its bare, stunted mast, rolled loutishly on the tide;

it dipped its deck to view and swung up again till not even a head was visible over the bulwarks.

"If I have to go on board that I shall be ill!" said Sabrina, not relishing the sight of those heavy luges on a frisky sea.

Peeping from under the sail as they drew near, she saw the boy's light hair tossing capless in the breeze, saw him glance round at the coming boat, and stoop down again to the business which occupied him.

"What is he doing?" she asked.

"Deck-swabbing," said David; "seems cheerful enough, doesn't he? See, there he goes with his bucket!" As he spoke he put the tiller across; the sail swung.

"How fast we come on!" cried Sabrina, as the dark hull rose before them. "And the water is all like oil!"

"Yes, we are well in the spool now," said David. "I must be quick out with a line; there'll be no getting back else." He stood up, steadying the tiller with his knee. "Light-ship ahoy!" he sang, as the boat drew alongside, and flung off a long coil of rope.

Ronald, dropping his mop, leapt, caught the end of it in flight, and made fast.

"Smartly done," said David, with an approving nod. In a moment the sail was down.

"Hullo, David!" cried the youth, "what brings you——" and got no further; his mouth fell open at a gasp.

Sabrina met his eye with a severe gaze. "Ronald," she said, "I think you are very unkind!"

He hung lantern-jawed over the light-ship's side, and looked at her, his head a little askew, very ridiculous and charming, with open throat, bare arms, and damp, tousled hair.

"Why am I?" he asked.

"You must answer that question for yourself.

I can't say why; I only know the trouble you are giving me. What are you here for?"

"Because I want to be alone."

"Alone? What have you done with the crew?"

"Oh, those fellows don't matter—they don't *know*. I'm here because this is where wrecks come." He tried to look like one.

Sabrina smiled incredulously. "Well, I am a wreck too, then," she said. "I am famished."

"What! Have you had no breakfast?"

"A mere scrap. How could I have any appetite till I knew what had become of you?"

"Ah!" said Ronald, "have I made you very unhappy?" He expressed the pious hope with an unutterably sad countenance.

"What you have done to me doesn't matter," she answered. "I can easily get over it. But you are making your aunt anxious, and the Squire cross—cross with me, I mean," she added, seeing how little he was concerned.

"Whatever for?"

"He holds me responsible for the loss of his best cigars; so, while you come here and enjoy yourself, I have to do penance."

"Enjoying myself!" cried Ronald, as though the notion were an outrage on his feelings. "Do you think I can find any 'enjoyment' here?" He indicated the walls of his prison.

"I do," said Sabrina; "I imagine you eat, and drink, and smoke."

One of his two ship-mates, hearing voices, had come up on deck; a cigar between his lips told of good comradeship on board. Seeing a lady alongside, he pulled a forelock, and grinned, shooting a queer side-glance at the youth.

"You think I have no real soul," said Ronald, not to be diverted from his theme.

"No real sense, is what I accuse you of," said Sabrina. "Tell me, have you any hot water on



board? We have brought tea with us, and I begin to want some badly."

Ronald sprang to do service, and disappeared down the hatch.

The man came and leaned over the ship's side, looking communicative.

"A rum go!" he remarked, with a jerk of the head, indicating the absent youth. "And a real gentleman he is, too." He drew out his cigar, contemplating it as one who knew a good thing.

"Our 'parlour-boarder,' my mate calls him," he went on. "What's he been a-doin' of? 's been up to something, — I can see that with half an eye: soon as he's asleep he begins mewing like a tom-cat all forlorn. Oh, I don't want to ask no questions; he's doing very well where he is — very well."

David, the immediate recipient of these observations, was meanwhile busying himself with the boat-tackle, hauling in under shelter of the light-ship till they now lay close, straining on a short leash. "Tide turns when?" he asked the man. Not for a good hour he was told.

Sabrina had already brought out the provisions when Ronald reappeared with a steaming kettle. David fetched it across on a boathook.

"Don't scald yourself!" cried Ronald, anxiously, seeing Sabrina, unsteady of balance, preparing to take it in hand.

"Won't you come over and help me?" she said, making for once conscious use of look and voice.

In an instant Ronald was at her side. Putting trust in his steadiness of hand, she held the teapot under the spout for him. David climbed up on to the light-ship, leaving the two alone. There, under her wing, with all the adorable emanations of her presence about him, touched now and again by the brim of her hat, by her hand, by the hem of her raiment, Ronald found himself all at once defenceless; he stood exposed, cut off from retreat, a

naughty boy expecting to be chid and with no answer ready. The dreaded attack did not come; Sabrina was too magnanimous to extend her advantage further; she asked him if he had been fishing, if he slept upon deck, how often the light-ship took in fresh provisions, was it his first experiment? She was, in a word, altogether matter of fact over the youth's truancy; and the more she ignored the situation, the more ridiculously ashamed of himself did the poor lad become. His self-consciousness became at once pathetic and comic. When the picnic meal was over, habit prompted him to smoke; yet though he wished to he could not: it was out of character. Not knowing what to do with his hands, he grew shy, till, to his confusion, he found himself fingering his cigarette case, and Sabrina watching him, with her eye on it.

"Yes, you may smoke, Ronald," she said, smiling. "Are you waiting to ask my leave?"

There was no drawing back then: to protest when there were actually cigars on board to convict him of a retained habit was ridiculous; and with the lighting of that first cigarette, in the presence of the hopelessly adored one, the heroic pose of his life's crisis was over. Tripped by his instincts, he realized what is in fact a true phenomenon of life—how much easier it is to nurse a broken heart in vacuum—in absence, that is to say, from the cause of it—than in her sweet bodily presence. The imaginative romantic heart must go round a corner to die; it wants no voice but echo to answer its dying tones, no eye but solitude's to watch its wan dissolution to the shades. Irrevocable loss cannot so well be conjured up under a benignantly smiling eye: youth's charmer has but to treat him with a little sense, comprehend without probing his mind, and horrible convalescence seizes him. So Ronald now sat up and revived, greatly against his will; he could not go

on dying with Sabrina sitting there watching him, for the simple reason that she could not see he was dying; and the actor cannot act who wins neither the plaudits nor conviction from his audience.

Sabrina, as the time for returning drew near, treated her visit as a picnic, fellow to his own.

"When," she asked, "may I tell the Squire that you are coming back?"

And he answered, as though his mind had not been made up for him by any outside agency —

"I did think of going over myself, to-day or to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?" she inquired. "If you can be ready without keeping us waiting too long. David has to get back to his work, and we are hindering him." Haste was a help to the remedy.

The boy dived below for his belongings, and, after a few minutes' skirmishing, returned curiously laden. Did ever hermit retire from the world with so jumbled an assortment of luxuries and necessities? Dumb-bells, boxing-gloves, fishing tackle, a shaving mirror, a backgammon board, a thick overcoat, a mackintosh, and two changes of raiment: these the eye could count up as he came trailing them. Provisions and perishables, except for a remnant of the purloined cigars, he was leaving behind as part-payment to his shipmates. They came grinning and smug from the settling-up of accounts, and over the ship's side bade their guest a hearty farewell, offering him the same berth and board should he at any future time need sea-air.

"We'll drink you and your lady's good 'ealth, sir," was their parting cry. It was to be hoped that the sea-bacon would know that night how to look after itself.

Ronald was very happy temporarily; he and Sabrina sat aft side by side, and shared the steering. Only once during the return voyage did he demonstrate. David's back was turned; quick at the opportunity he dipped his head, and laid sad

homage upon the third finger of Sabrina's left hand. After a patient moment, she drew her hand away.

"Ah!" he sighed wistfully, "had you only let me keep that finger for you, I would have given it back when you wanted it — when you really wanted it." Boyish, foolish, and fond, he had, by discernment, managed to touch uncomfortably at the truth; the implied accusation went unanswered. Ronald's gaze turned in the direction of his thoughts; Sabrina's went out to sea.

Arriving at home, she found that Valentine had come early, and had gone in the direction of the cliffs to look for her; she wondered how it was that they had missed each other. Expecting him soon to return, she kept a look-out, and saw presently, on the lower slope of down, over Amesbay, David Lorry turning his sheep into fresh pasture. The day had grown hot and clear, with the sparkling brilliance which precedes rain. While his dog did the work, David sat on the top-rail of a fence gazing out sea-wards. Presently she saw him stand high on the rail, shading his eyes with his hand: all at once he leapt down and ran for the shore. After the master went the dog, but a moment later came flying back to his duties, and, when the last sheep was in, mounted guard over the gate he could not close.

David was then out of sight; Sabrina did not see him return.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A PREDICAMENT

AMESBAY shingle runs down steeply to the sea. Three strides takes a bather beyond his depth; yet the water is so clear that the eye still sees the pebbly formation of its bed, and, further out, among the rocky ruins of cliffs fallen centuries ago, trails of brown seaweed swaying over their own shadows. In hot weather revealed depth offers a double refreshment to thirsty limbs: even the soft oozy touch of weeds too compact for entanglement becomes a delight.

It was nine o'clock, and the day was already warm: in places sheltered from the wind the sun was strong enough to cause a burning of the skin. The pebbles of the shore had begun to throw up heat in vapours that flickered like flame, giving to distant objects a vague sense of motion, of departure from their solid form.

As far as the in-shore side of the huge archway known as "Abbot's Door," the bay was a safe one for swimmers. Beyond this the eye could glimpse tier behind tier of broken column-like boulders, over which sprang now and again sharp jets of spray, where sea-currents pent among rocky alleys smote upon rugged walls and projecting cornices of stone.

Since he had been in the neighbourhood, Reddie had bathed at Amesbay on several occasions on the side furthest from Abbot's Door. The discovery that a small stream which here flowed into the bay chilled the water in its vicinity by nearly a degree

was his reason to-day for shifting ground; he undressed and took his first dive from shelter of the rock, whose last stride sea-wards is the flying buttress we have just described.

A twenty yards' swim gives a very different perspective to the object approached from that which it presents when seen from shore; and Valentine had no sooner swum into the sharp shadows cast by the great archway, than its immense bulk and breadth of span gripped his imagination. Impelled to a further venture for view of its sea-ward aspect, he was well rewarded in the initial stage of his progress by the awe-inspiring beauty of the rock as he came immediately beneath it. So viewed it seemed on the verge of utter downfall which a single strong wind or tide would suffice to bring about. These thousand tons of rock suspended above his head appeared as though upheld by mere caprice, a freak contrary to the law of gravity: the ponderous bar of matter, rugged and monstrous, leaning slightly from the perpendicular, divided the sky above into two bright hemispheres; and the whole weight of the decomposing structure rested on a foot which, where it entered the sea, showed clearly the wear and tear of the tides that were slowly undermining it. It was as though an invisible shackle had fretted it to the bone, and that this last support of all required but a blow that should cause it to snap, and hurl everything to ruin.

Valentine was familiar enough with the more savage front of nature, where her beauty and strength merge and become terrible; but he had seldom felt of so little account, so much in the grip of powers disproportionate to his own, as when he swung on the inwash of the tide under the dark beetling crag, and realized in the smooth heave of its waters what iron force and determination there lay latent. Though a swimmer of fair average, he found, to his surprise, that his ordinary strokes merely kept him stationary, bringing him no nearer the goal for

which he aimed. Thus thwarted of his object, he took up the challenge, breasted the current manfully, and before long had beaten his way through. Return would of course be easy: yet it was wonderful to look back and know what an ambush of power lurked in that narrow passage.

Reaching the open he turned about, gazing up at the archway out of which he had emerged. "My heavens, that was an eye-opener!" was his half-dazed reflection. He was a little intoxicated by his victory, and began looking ahead for fresh adventure. On the further side of a short space of clear water stood a jumble of shattered uprights, all of which in their day had formed part of the solid cliff: he swam forward, examining the many troughs and gulleets through which the tide swirled. Wiser now, he directed his course toward a broader opening, fetched a compass, and so bore round again from the sea-ward: thus, reckoning on the tide to help him, he thought to explore the channels and make his way through and back to the Abbot's Door. He swam to a point where entrance seemed easy; borne on a soft swell he passed in between two closely abutting rocks, and was just thinking—"Here I am, then!" when the rush of a counter-eddy caught hold of him and carried him backwards. In the surprise of it he lost his head: feeling his chest brushed by a tangle of seaweed, he seized hold of it with slipping fingers, lighted on a jag of submerged rock, and clung. Blind walls of rock rose on either side: down swirled the sea in a cataract about his ears. Waiting for the force of the retiring wave to expend itself, he still thought that the rest of the way would be easy: but a vague consciousness that he had been a bit of a fool began to take hold of him, and with it vexation that he had allowed the unexpected to startle him out of his composure. So far he had got when a sudden shock hurled him forward: he felt as though his knees had struck under his chin: a big sea took him by

the scruff and forced him down, a weight of water swept over him. "Am I drowning?" he thought, struggled up desperately, and for a moment was able to draw free breath.

Then he became aware of a numbing sensation in one of his knees: the hand that he reached down when he drew it back bore marks of blood. He was now in a narrow channel with rocks about six feet high on either side of him: some jagged, mostly smooth; if he could climb one of these he might rest, and have a look round to discover a safe way out of his predicament, but the difficulty was to find a footing; the current here, though it was gradually carrying him on, knocked him this way and that, did almost what it liked with him; though he might guard himself from side blows, there was still the danger of sharp jags below to be reckoned with. A perplexed angry wonder took hold of him, a startled query as to what the end might be. The thought of death now stared him in the face as just possible, and yet really as preposterous. He had not done with life: it was absurd; he knew too much of affairs, had too much in him — vigour, hope, prospects, plans, things to do, things which he had left undone; why, there were letters, even, that he had not answered! Unanswerable in the midst of these thoughts came the buffeting seas. Wishing to know how much he bled, when a momentary lull came in the surging of the waves, he threw himself over and picked his knee out of water. The sight was sufficiently ghastly; brine was its best unguent; he let it go under again.

A pool-like widening of the channel through which he was making his way gave him a certain respite, a choice of ways opened before him, which was yet no choice; wherever rocks pointed an exit a swirl of waters seemed to forbid entry; there was no knowing which way was preferable. Just ahead, near and yet far, lay the line of cliffs crowning Abbot's Door; and about them he knew much: — all



their formation and geological history, the names of the plants that grew there, and the mews that lodged in their crannies; knowledge was there staring him in the face, and it was all profoundly useless and ironic; he was utterly ignorant of the right means for saving his life; was ever such ignorance as that? It angered him; he felt that he was a fool—a dullard. He laughed defiantly, laughed to hear himself laugh, to show that he could laugh. No, he was no fool, he would live! He was too lucky a fellow to die thus in a trap, in an almost smooth sea—to go under to that! He struggled on.

Fortune favoured him; he came on a rock which afforded a precarious foothold at its base—if he could only get to the top of that! Well, even if he could, he remembered that the tide would presently cover it, and the tide was coming in fast. All the same he did climb it, climbed it dragging a maimed leg, so far as to be able just to look over it and see, fifty yards away, Abbot's Door, and through it, like a small framed canvas, a green patch of field under the downs, with sheep passing in through a gate, a man sitting on a rail, and a dog running foolishly to and fro, barking. The sound carried faintly to his ears, prompting hope. The question was, if he could hear the dog bark, could the man hear him call,—would he see him? He shouted and threw up a hand.

He did this at intervals, without apparently attracting notice. He began to despair; as soon as the sheep were through, the fellow would shut the gate and go, and his last fair chance would be over. The bulk of the flock had already passed in; the man made a gesture to his dog to bring in a straggler. "You fool!" Reddie apostrophized him, as he watched the animal bound off to fulfil the light behest. Yes; it was done; the fellow's head was turned again sea-wards. Again Valentine shouted and flung up an arm. "Presently I shall be screaming, I suppose," he thought; "and that ass will

think it's a sea-gull!" He felt a little hatred for the man who sat there in safety, looking his way, yet never straight at him. Once more he threw up his hand in despair.

Ah! had the fellow seen him at last, then? He seemed to be at attention; yes, was actually sighting him; was getting down from that confounded perch of his, was running, heading straight for the shore. He disappeared in a dip. Valentine did not see him again, he had passed out of the canvas; but help was now on its way, and delay became bearable.

As he waited a sickening sense of foolishness came over him. A man who feels helpless feels also humiliated; he is caught looking like a fool. Valentine, clinging to the rock, supporting himself mainly on one leg, within near view of the shore, cut off by so small a barrier and yet actually helpless and dependent for his life on another's efforts, became infinitely more alive to the shame of his predicament than to its more serious aspect. He felt like a man in the pillory, a poor vagabond in the stocks; there he had to stand in a ridiculous, constrained attitude, waiting to be helped down, for he doubted now whether with his damaged knee he could get off unaided.

A couple of minutes passed; then, under the Abbot's Door, a dark blot appeared upon the water, the head of a man swimming towards him. He swam well, mastering the passage without difficulty; and now with a racer's strokes was crossing the narrow belt of clear water which divided the strewn rocks from the shore.

Valentine again held up his hand in signal.

"Mr. Reddie, is that you?" called a voice.

"Yes," he answered, and knew then who was his rescuer.

The knowledge did not please him, though it assured him of delivery. He had not long held the position of favoured lover, and while dubious as to his chances, his eye had been jealously sharp.

Sabrina's warm regard for her cousin had not escaped his notice; and for any but physical reasons he was the last man to whom Valentine would have chosen to be indebted for service.

In a short time David had reached the rock upon which Reddie was standing.

"Are you all right?" he called.

"I've knocked my knee," said Reddie.

"Can't you get down?"

"I'm not sure; it feels pretty beastly just now."

David caught hold of the ledge of rock which was the other's foothold.

"Let yourself down on my shoulder," he said; "never mind how! Then I can tow you out."

"If you can you are a pretty good swimmer," said Reddie. "I don't want to drown you too. What an unholy place this is to get into!"

"Ay; it's awkward for those who don't know it."

Valentine took the remark as an accusation of folly, and made no reply. Without much trouble David got him down.

"Lay yourself out straight," said he; "you mustn't mind if you get knocked a bit; the flow comes up these narrows uncommon strong when once it begins."

"So I've found," replied the other.

No more words were exchanged till the difficulties of the passage were over.

"I'll swim myself, now," said Reddie, when they found themselves again in clear water: "if I can, that is; just leave me to try."

Unable to use his crippled knee, his progress was slow and painful; David now and then gave him a helping hand.

Passing under the Abbot's archway, Valentine had no longer an eye for its picturesque grandeur; he was looking at the shore. The steep slope of grey shingle backed by green mounds of turf was

beautiful to behold; even the sight of his own garments filled him with a strange pleasure like a meeting of old friends; and then the impression changed, and the whole thing became a dream, a passing incident, rather absurd except for the damage to his knee.

"You have had a good deal of practice at this sort of thing, I suppose?" he remarked, as he mounted the beach with the help of David's arm.

"Yes, a good deal, once upon a time."

"Well, it has come luckily for me, and I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged to you. You were at sea for some years, were you not?"

"Yes, I was."

"I remember Miss Warham mentioning it."

"Very likely."

"Anyway, I owe you a thousand thanks. You are a fine swimmer; I only wish I were. It's a big thing to be able to say you've saved a man."

"Maybe, if there's danger in doing it; but here, you see, there was none, so there's no occasion to speak of it to any one."

"That is what I feel," said Valentine, quickly; "very much better to say nothing—if you don't mind. Of course it doesn't alter my gratitude; I am under an obligation I can't express."

"Oh no," said David; "you needn't think anything of that sort."

"I shall always remember it, and shall hope some day to pay it back. By Jove, you strip well!" He eyed David's figure with a half-hostile admiration. "It's no wonder you're a swimmer!" he said. "There's a statue of your namesake standing in the great square of Florence, done by a big chap named Michael Angelo; and I declare you are like it; head just a bit smaller, that's all."

David accepted this description of himself without comment; having carefully bandaged Valentine's wounded knee, he finished dressing, and strolled back to the gate where his dog stood waiting his

return. He had been gone hardly more than half an hour.

Some time later Valentine met Sabrina for the first time that day. He walked lame.

"I gave myself a nasty knock while bathing this morning," he said in answer to her inquiry.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### SABRINA REDDIE

IN the beginning of August Lady Berrers came down from London, and learned with a sinking heart that the wedding was to take place within the fortnight. Her gaze upon Sabrina when they met was tenderly reproachful.

"Oh, you dreadful dear!" was her first greeting, "Are you happy?" her first inquiry.

Sabrina bore the scrutiny well. "Happiness is only a mood," she said. "I am contented. Is not that better?"

"Oh yes, I suppose so!" her friend assented. "The shocks you give others seem to have only a soothing effect upon you. I never can calculate now what you will be doing next. Yet you never come unawares on yourself, I imagine?"

"Yes," said Sabrina; "lately I have been a little surprised at myself; but surely I have not surprised you? This is what you always wished and expected."

"Is it? Did I?" The expression of the lady's face became complex, a little wistful; discretion got the mastery. "Oh, well, I pray Heaven's blessing on you, always, always! If your mother is satisfied, if you are, I ought to be. And, my dear,— I say it to forgive you, not to reproach you,— I know it is for the best that you should go. Ronald really does love you with all that dear, poor, foolish heart of his; and nothing but you married, with a married woman's etceteras about you, will cure him. I see that now. Who is to give you away?"

"My mother."

"What? She will be well enough?"

"She says so."

"Ah, that means much, then! In one direction at least you have given unexpected happiness."

"Indeed, she is always telling me so: somehow it troubles me to see what a load has been lifted from her mind. I feel that I have been blind to how much she thought and cared for me."

"I always told you so. Yes, she will miss you now."

"No, very little," said Sabrina. "It is not my company, but my future, that she is anxious about. I ought to be thankful that it is so, since we have now to part."

"Others will miss you as well; more than you think, perhaps. You never will allow yourself to see how much people become attached to you."

"Do you mean Mrs. Gage?" asked Sabrina, smiling a little bitterly, for her ministrations in that direction had never lost their penitential character.

"Ah, poor woman, no! She is a bitter soul. I hear that she is really dying at last."

"Yes, the end is near now; it has seemed a cruel, useless delay."

"How can we tell that? Have you ever heard more of Lottie?"

"Not a word."

"I almost think that I saw her in London the other day; I could not be sure, as I was driving at the time. Poor girl! I wonder what has been her fate."

"Did she look well cared for?"

"Yes, but thin and much older; that is what made me doubtful."

"I had hoped," said Sabrina, "that some day I might hear from her; but her uncle, who knew something at first, has no longer any news. She and he had a liking for each other which she used

to conceal from her aunt; and I have told him to let her know that I am her friend if she ever is in need of help. But it seems very unlikely that we shall ever hear anything of her now."

"And *your* uncle, my dear," said Lady Berrers. "What about him? Does his sad condition make him a great burden on David's hands?"

"I cannot say," answered Sabrina; "you know what David is, how little he shows what he feels. My uncle is quite helpless, and will be up to the end. Did Ronald tell you of the other thing that happened—about Ron, I mean?"

"Yes, he wrote as if it had been himself; he took it—how shall I say?—symbolically: the iron had entered his soul also. It was the day of the news."

Sabrina said, "I have to leave Ron behind me; and David offers him a home. Will Ronald forgive me if I explain?"

"If it were any one but your cousin, I think he would not," said Lady Berrers. "But to David's interests he has always been passionately resigned; and this will but be in keeping with the rest."

Sabrina did not ask to be told what exact meaning lay behind these words: her own thoughts in that direction were too grave and tender to be lightly touched upon.

A few days after this conversation a veil of the finest Brussels lace reached her with a promise of orange blossoms to go with it on the day. It was Lady Berrers' gift to the bride's loveliness; her taste for high wedding ceremonial making her wish to see Sabrina attired in a way befitting her beauty.

For love of the sender Sabrina wore it on the day of chimes, but as a scarf folded across her shoulders, with the orange flower pinned to her breast.

Valentine, holding lightly the convention of pre-nuptial aloofness, came down to see her before she started to church. The choice simplicity of her attire



won his taste, though he laughed, calling her "a Quaker in cream," and declared that, for a bride, she was in "half-mourning."

All the village turned out to see the bridal peep-show pass by. Sabrina and her mother drove together in the open carriage which was presently to convey the wedded pair to Warringford station. David himself, having business to do in the town, was to start with the luggage immediately after the ceremony, and was thus excused for an early departure from the scene of Sabrina's leave-taking.

There was quite a crowd at the church door to see the bride get out. She was the beauty of the neighbourhood, and the great lady's favourite; Valentine Reddie, also, had achieved popularity, and the match was approved by all. A small cheer went up from a group of school-children, handkerchiefs were fluttered by the women, hats were waved. Mrs. Warham, seeing her daughter so honoured, stepped that day with a gentle subdued majesty which brought out a certain likeness in herself to the quiet beauty of the bride. For once their station was recognized: peace and contentment were in her heart.

"Oh, you ridiculous humdrum darling!" cried Lady Berrers, embracing the girl within shelter of the porch, "why will you be so barefaced? Have you no blushes to conceal?" She indicated her gift of lace unbridally disposed of. "Yet you look beautiful and entirely yourself, as no one else could make you! Don't be alarmed when you get inside," she added in a whisper; "poor Ronny has been enjoying himself, and it's just like treading on caterpillars! I thought I would come to warn you. Wait till I get back to my place!" She returned in stately haste to the Castle pew, picking her steps up the aisle over the litter of her nephew's symbols.

He had, indeed, been enjoying himself. From the porch to the place where the bride would kneel,

the floor was strewn with long tails of "love-lies-bleeding," dark crimson knots and tangles, sprawling about like star-fish, and, as Lady Berrers had remarked, very like caterpillars to walk on.

A triumphant wail of music from the gallery greeted the bride on her entry.

"Ronny is at the organ!" whispered Lady Berrers, in arch commiserating tones, as Sabrina passed by on her way up to the altar.

In spite of its choral character the service did not take long; neither just cause nor impediment was declared against the union of Sabrina Warham and Valentine Reddie. Up in the tower the bells began chiming, overhead the sun shone without a cloud; handfuls of rice were cordially showered on the happy couple as they emerged from the church door.

Lady Berrers prayed to be delivered from tears, and was saved with difficulty. Mrs. Warham wept comfortably. Everything was of happy augury; everybody was pleased. The great lady drove Mrs. Warham home in her own carriage, letting the married pair go ahead.

"A very charming fellow!" she said, flattering the widow's ear with praise of her new son-in-law.

"I find him a very good young man," said Mrs. Warham, "and quite a gentleman. My daughter has not married beneath her. A great weight is off my mind, and I have much to be thankful for."

Lady Berrers found a blessing to say on more outward things.

"They are the handsomest young couple I have ever seen; I hope they may be the happiest!" Following her own line of thought on the ceremony just concluded, "I did not see David there?" she said. "Was he?"

"I believe he sat somewhere behind," said the widow, "near the rest of the farm men. They were given a holiday for the occasion. Yes, David has

always behaved very properly; he has never tried to intrude on us."

"He is a true gentleman," said Lady Berrers, speaking with emphasis. "Would that there were more like him—men independent of our small divisions of class! And I only wish I could see anywhere a wife good enough for him."

"He will have no difficulty in finding one, I imagine," said the widow. "When his father dies, considering his position, he will be well off."

In the afternoon Sabrina and her husband drove along the road under the down. Her hand lay in his; the happiness of giving happiness was hers, and the heart to which she had brought that boon was, she assured herself, no undeserving one. As an accepted lover Valentine had commended himself to her taste more than as a suitor. She did not like being prayed to, preferring the sense of equality which closer relations had brought about. There was youth and warmth in her heart, and she had confidence in the prospect of life and work and comradeship that lay ahead.

Looking back for a last farewell to the place that had become her home, she saw moving along the side of the down near its crest a white figure following their course at a distance. From the rate at which it moved she could tell that the figure was that of a man running; he ran in flannels and without a hat: there could be no doubt as to his identity. Cruelly kind, she drew out her handkerchief and fluttered it in sign of farewell. The figure stopped abruptly, evidently watching, then slowly, very slowly, lifting a similar ensign, gave a limp wave, loosed and let it float away on the wind along the side of the down. It was Ronald's last picture of himself and his despair, beautifully done; he could have made a fortune on the stage.

"Poor boy!" she sighed, yet could not help smiling as well.

"What are you doing?" asked Valentine, catching sight of her signal and hearing the sigh.

"Only saying good-bye to some one I'm fond of," she answered; "a dear faithful follower of mine."

"What, David Lorry?" he said, forgetting for the moment that it could not be.

Her face grew rigid at the words. "No, Ronald Lutworth," she answered in uncommunicative tone. "I thought you knew."

Once, and twice again, she looked back as they drove on to Warringford, and each time saw a small white spot moving upon the downs, but did not wave again. He was running in her thoughts for a long time afterwards; it was perhaps the sole reward he had aimed for.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### SABRINA'S MOON

LATE that night David drove back from Warrington over the same road. At the station he had seen to the labelling of the boxes, and afterwards, from a shelter at the far end of the platform, had watched Sabrina's departure into her new world. On returning to the trap he found the dog Ron, bereft of its mistress, standing forlorn; and learned from the boy in charge that the lady had twice come back from the platform to look for him, and had left kind messages in his absence.

Reproach lay on his conscience for the omission of a courtesy which she had gone out of her way to seek. He had indeed deliberately avoided the ordeal of parting words, with another standing by; and she, it seemed, in kind thoughtfulness, had come alone to give him the very farewell he could have wished for. He was full of tender regret that his last act had been to disappoint her.

The heath, as he drove across it, loomed in solid blackness under an opaque sky, and the moon, now past its full, had not breasted the downs when he turned from the hard road to the soft miry track which skirted the wood-covers of East Gill. Here the lonely beat of the nightjar, heard constantly on the stillness of the heath, became merged in the near rustlings of the surrounding undergrowth. Now and then a rabbit, waiting till the last moment, made a quick bolt across the lane under the horse's feet. A faint stir in the thickets signalled the disturbance of hidden life.

David had not troubled to light his lamp, for in that district police regulations carried little weight, and he could often see better in the natural obscurity to which his sight had so long been trained. Presently he discerned, a few yards ahead on the grassway that edged the track, the blurred outline of a figure stretched motionless upon the ground.

By its whiteness it suggested a woman; by its shape a man. David pulled up sharply, and heard from just below a mingled sob of weeping and spent breath. Divining what son of sorrow was there seeking comfort of mother earth, he got down, and laying compassionate hands on the youth's shoulders, turned him turtlewise.

"Shame on you, man! Get up!" he said sternly, on beholding Ronald face to face.

But bed of earth seemed still the only spot whence the poor lad could win balm to his misery; he rolled once more face to ground.

"Oh, David!" he wailed in grief, "she's married! she's married! I can't bear it!"

David let the fact be as stated. "What has brought you here?" he asked.

"I don't know," moaned Ronald, rubbing his nose to grass. "I got here somehow, I suppose."

"You've been running?"

The youth warmed to a recital of the exertions into which misery had urged him.

"I've been trying to run away from myself ever since she went," he said; "first along the top of the downs to Warringford, and then, after I'd seen the train start, back again; and then—oh, then I don't know where I went to; until I got here. I caught my foot in something and fell. It's all the same whether I'm down or up. I suppose I've been here ever since. And oh, David, I tell you I just want to die! I *will* die! I wish I could do it to-night! What time is it?"

David reckoned it nearer eleven than ten, and

forbore to waste a match in giving accurate definition to the hour of Ronald's despair. The amorously forlorn youth lowed like a calf at the slaughter.

"Oh, David, man, I can't bear it—I can't! I daren't think, even!"

"Get up!" said David, making a show of anger, and jerked him to feet that strove to deny their office.

Ronald hung in a love-lies-bleeding attitude, till, shaken and let go, he steadied himself, and began to allow outside objects to form an impression on his brain.

"Is that Ron?" he inquired feebly when the dog came up to fawn on him. "So he has got over his wound, has he, poor beast?"—an indication of his own less fortunate state.

"Oh ay!" said his friend, "Ron's all right; so will you be when you've put a little food inside you. Get up, and be a man! it's no good waiting here!"

Ronald, with one foot up in act to mount, took it down again.

"It's no use," he said; "I'm not going home to-night."

"You'll not stay here, anyway," was David's decision. "You've got to come along."

"Where are you going? What d'you mean to do?"

"Get the mare into stable first—time she was there now. Don't make us be longer about it than we need."

"Did she say anything to you before she left?" inquired Ronald, as he climbed meekly to David's side. "Did she leave any message?"

"Time enough to tell you all that when we've got the mare in," said his friend, holding back the flap for him to enter. He found him on contact as dank with dew as the vegetation he had rolled in. He was without coat or hat, his shirt gaped,

and he had no vest under it; his teeth were chattering from chill and general exhaustion.

David wrapped him in the cart-rug, and drove on. "I'm sorry I have no brandy with me," he remarked.

Ronald preferred misery without stimulant. "I don't want any," he said, and relapsed into silence. When he spoke again it was to point to a blister of light among the trees, caused by the emerging moon, and to remark in a voice hollow as a ghost's, "I wonder if she sees that!"

David clicked his tongue to the mare, and shook her into a trot.

Ten minutes later they came to the corner of the village where a gate led into the park.

"Are you going to get down?" inquired David, "or will you come on with me? We can find you a bed at the farm now."

"I don't care what I do," droned Ronald; "but I don't want a bed."

He spoke as though a generic distaste for such luxuries had entered his soul.

Finding this lump of folly passive on his hands, David took charge of it without more words, and drove on to the Monastery Farm. When the mare had been comfortably stabled, they entered a house charged with the stillness of night and the noise of slumber. A muffled roar from the nasal organs of field-labourers in repose thundered to them from above. David foraged for food and drink, making the unwilling youth swallow what, though his spirit rejected it as an indignity, his body so much needed. Then, bidding Ronald follow, he led the way up the side stair from the entrance hall to the left wing. Here, opening a door, he disclosed a small chamber whose white-curtained window lay open to the cool night air; the faint glow of the waning moon shone directly in.

Ronald looked, drew back from the threshold, and fetched forth from his bosom a tumultuous



sigh. In another moment he had bounded across to the window.

"What fool has been letting out her air—the very air she breathed!" he cried, and clapped to the lattice. Then he turned about and stood gaping at the central emptiness, lying so still in its shroud of white.

David lighted one of two candles set in china stands on the dressing-table, and at his side Ronald stood and breathed, like a guilty child at the door of a jam-closet. All at once he flung himself down by the bed, clawing the pillow into a fond embrace.

"Oh, David, she's gone! she's gone!" he wailed.

"We knew that ten hours ago," said his companion. "Can you make yourself comfortable here?"

Ronald crouched miserably over his beloved bundle of goose-feathers.

"I suppose so," he said; "as well here as anywhere. No; I don't want anything else. I'll lie just as I am."

David took him at his word, and leaving him for a while, went down through the dark sleeping house to the parlour below. This, of all the rooms in the house that must always be his, was for him the one most full of her presence. On the chimney-piece he saw a small bookcase holding about twenty volumes; on it lay a written paper. The writing was Sabrina's—simply her name and his; her farewell gift to him left there in his absence. He took down one of the books, and opening, found it inscribed with his name. He opened all; his name was in each one. While he stood there forgetful of time, the candle which he had brought in with him burned down to its socket, and went out. In the darkness he felt his way out, and returning to that other room, pushed the door open, and looked in. There, too, the light was out. Along the foot of the bed Ronald lay fast asleep, folding to his breast the pillow on which he reclined. His breath was even and undisturbed.

David glanced at the disordered bed, robbed of its crowning snows; thence his eye travelled out into the velvet softness of the night. Along the heavily dusked shoulder of the down the dispirited moon sank toward the glimmering sea-line that lay out beyond Amesbay. Far off the sail of a single fishing-boat gloomed in the brightness and passed.

No bed gave rest to David Lorry's limbs that night. Miles out on the quietly heaving waters of the bay he saw Sabrina's moon go coldly down before the approach of dawn.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### IN WHICH ONE CHARACTER REAPPEARS

EVERY one has heard of that delicate mechanism of secrecy—the Brahma lock, which, like the sealed cave in the Arabian Nights, is unlocked by a word—even, one might say, by a letter, for, till the last cipher falls into place, the key keeps its hold. So is it often in the affairs of men, when something as small and insignificant as word or letter comes to disjoin the whole structure of a well-laid plan.

In the background of this history stands one, a frail character, without strength, friends, or reputation, one incapable, it might seem, of affecting in any material way the fortunes of others, still less of becoming the very key which was to break open to the rough handling of Fate the central happiness of stronger lives.

Lottie Gage had disappeared from her native place, drawn away by the only strong impulse that ever entered her fair and frail nature—that of love. Her flitting marked the real close of her desperate happiness, for with it an end had come to her full trust in the good which the future had seemed to hold in store. Not that she was left uncared for in the material sense, not that she was left all at once to lead the lonely existence among strangers which afterwards fell to her lot; but from the very first she saw slipping away from her that dream for the realization of which she had hazarded all. Like that village maiden told of in the annals of Burleigh, who found herself outmatched, Lottie had

come to know that the man she loved was not of her own class, her own way of thought or feeling; above all, was not of that religion of love which had enveloped and lifted her to mate her endless devotion with his own transient passion. Very simply and surely the truth came home to her in the first days of her new life in a great town. Her lover did not love her enough to marry her; and with that blow, like a bruise upon her tender heart, it seemed hardly to matter that he was still kind while he shared her life, and not altogether forgetful of her comfort when they were parted.

Lottie's history, after she left East Gill, may be summarily divided into three periods: the first and briefest was one of tremulous suspense followed by timid resignation, of love that might plead but could not utter reproaches; the discovery that the man she loved was in a worldly sense too high for her, robbed her mind of all argument against him. In the second period her life underwent a further change; it reverted. Business called her lover away, and at his advice she re-entered service. She quitted it some months later, impelled by reasons that left her without choice, and taking quiet lodgings in a south London suburb, passed through her third period, essentially a waiting one. Here, known as Mrs. Reed, she was among respectable people; remittances came regularly. Reddie had bought her a wedding ring as a protection, and the lowly state of her mind may be inferred from her grateful acceptance of the gift. The ring was, indeed, her treasure; it exercised over her mind a hypnotizing influence; looking at it she would say softly to herself, "I am Mrs. Reed," and could take comfort in the thought that, as the name was a fictitious one, it remained all the more her own; it was, moreover, the only name by which her lover was known to her.

In this time of waiting, she grew so fond over the notion, that at last she came to believe in it;

that she was, in truth, the wife of Frederick Reed, stonemason. She began to dream of a return to her native place, with marriage lines to show—surely they would not be hard to procure when the thing was so nearly true, ring and name, and maintenance all there. At her East Gill home things had run so smoothly; words so like promises had been breathed in its covered solitudes, pledged silence had made promise seem doubly sure. And he was a stonemason; no deception was there,—locally, at least, it was true. The first time she ever met him was on a summer excursion into Wedport; and she had seen him come out of the new harbour-works, powdered white with stone dust. That had been the beginning of things. She did not care if he was anything else to the outside world, so long as in that one place he was really a stonemason, not so far above her after all. If she could live there and he come to her now and then, she would not care much, or would try not to care—no, not even for what the world might say about a husband who was so much away. She was Mrs. Reed; in no part or thought of her being was she less than his true wife.

Thinking thus, she wrote at last to the address her lover had given her, pleading that she might be allowed to return, as near, at least, as Wedport, to her old home, and to be known there as Mrs. Reed. Yet her very claim had more of submission in it than insistence; she wished only to know his will.

His answer was not the negative she had feared; he told her to wait. "I hope soon to make a home for you," he wrote, "and Wedport will probably be the place." This was actually set down in black and white, a postscript at the end of his letter. It meant, then, that her hope was to be realized after all! Greatly daring in the first flush of her excitement and pride, she wrote to her uncle, sending through him news to the neighbourhood. "Tell

them I am married, and have been for some time; and now I am soon going to come back and see you all. How is poor Aunt?" There were many questions in this letter that gave no address.

For some time after this she was too much occupied with herself to think of anything so far away as her home; all thoughts of coming or going were postponed. On the first day of convalescence she sat up and wrote to her parted lover a few tender and artless words, giving news of the arrival of her little son. She received no answer. Money now reached her regularly from an indirect source. She comforted herself by re-reading the letter whose postscript promised her a home. That meant to her as much marriage as her humble heart claimed. The time was coming; perhaps just now he was busy, or absent. She would have no doubt but that the summons would presently arrive. And then?

What woman, seeing her lover's eyes in those of a new-born child, doubts the exceeding strength of an argument in which, for her, soul and body are summed up! Foolishly glad, brimming with new pride, she wrote again to her uncle, giving him her latest news. Without in the least knowing it, she had made a bold stroke for establishing her credit in the neighbourhood. The rather reticent announcement of her marriage, coming late, followed by more triumphant word of the completing event, routed any larger suspicions those who knew her might have formed. Morals were easy in that part of the world; and it was guessed that Lottie had merely been a little lax about placing the ceremonial of marriage at the full distance ordained by convention from the subsequent registration of a birth. It is a point gained when the currency of local gossip passes through unmalevolent channels; and Tam George was not one who ever tried his hand at the wrecking of reputations.

This partial rehabilitation of Lottie's character

came just at the time of her aunt's death, too late for that prophetic of evil to hear her worst predictions as to her niece's fate discredited.

Gage walked at his wife's funeral, sober and in decent attire. He was in pocket by her death to the amount of seven shillings weekly, and could not be thought, considering all the circumstances, to have suffered a great bereavement. But he satisfied the conventions, wore a weeper, wept, and the next day became the unconcerned man he had a right to be.

Rendered sociable by the event, he paid, then, one of his periodic visits to the Castle Arms, to receive the condolence of his fellows, which took form in curiously divided speech—the upshot being that it was a bad business this of losing a wife whom you don't want, and who doesn't want you; but that it was all very much for the best, and not the less good for having been so long expected.

One of the company called to mind how in East Gill deaths and marriages had always had a way of coming in pairs.

“Not such a very close pair this time, though,” observed Long John. “Your wife was too slow with her dying; while that young married couple got ahead with their business and out of the parish almost before we knew it was settled.”

“Ay, and I hear they'll be on their way back before long,” remarked another. “Be that true, Tam George?”

The carrier was always thus appealed to for the confirmation of any fresh news; if he had not heard of it the rumour lost credit till further corroboration made it good.

Of this item of intelligence Tam George had already heard.

“Not,” said he, “that they be altogether coming back, either. Two months from now, so I been told, they be going abroad. Oh yes, Mr. Reddie and his wife mean to be great travellers; we shan't

see much of them now, I reckon. He only did come here to win her, so to speak. Ah! and it was my cart he come in, — talking of valentines, too, I remember, — meaning himself all the time. Artful that, now, wasn't it? Well, and that's what he is; as artful and pleasant a gentleman as you med wish to see."

Reddie's name was popular with all, and those present agreed in Tam George's estimate of his virtues. The marriage was still a topic of interest in the neighbourhood.

"Why, then, be they coming back here at all?" inquired Sam Carter.

"Well, it isn't exactly here that they are coming," answered the carrier. "Mr. Reddie, you know, keeps his collections over at Hawk's Point; and, except for them, the place is now all empty and deserted. So he and the young missis are going there for a bit, just to clear things out of the way, and I dare say to have a bit end to their honeymoon. For any other time of matrimony 'twould be a lonesome place to take a young wife to; but Dan Curtis, who was there last, he told me it was so arranged."

"Ah, she won't mind that!" remarked Long John; "she's always had her silent ways and solitary goings, unlike other young women. It always did seem her one idea to get up on to they downs and stick there."

"Well," observed another, "Hawk's Point 'll be a very suitable place for her, then, till she tires of it. And you say there is nobody there now, is there?"

"No; they are all settled at the new station now," said Tam George, "every man Jack of 'em. The married pair 'll have nobody within two miles of 'em."

"Ah, well, we shall see how sweet they are on each other by the time they stop there," remarked Giles. "I wouldn't give 'em more than a fortnight of it, I wouldn't."



"Now, that, Giles, just shows your ignorance," said Tam George, severely. "People of their sort don't get over the first sweets of matrimony as soon as we do. They got more money and time to spend on it than we have, and it's easy to waste your wits when your pocket's full. Why, I've know'd cases — one, I mean — among the real gentry, where the newly married pair didn't become sensible again, not for more than a year afterwards. And then it came very sudden indeed, and the wife up and ran away. That happened twenty years ago, the old doctor at Warringford was the man; and he took to his bed and died of it."

At this conspicuous example of sudden sense intervening to break up the happy follies of matrimony, the company maintained a respectful silence.

After a while Long John spoke up. "Talking of marriage," said he, "when's David Lorry going to take to himself a wife? It's about time he did something that way now he's his own master, so to speak."

"Ah," said Tam George, slowly tapping out the ashes of his pipe. "You think so, do you?"

"Well, neighbour, don't you, now?"

Tam looked mysterious; he nodded darkly away from his audience as though in the direction of things known only to himself.

"I don't mind saying this much," he said; "but I won't say more till it's proved. You'll find that David Lorry is not a marrying man."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A BOND OF UNION

LESS than two months after her marriage Sabrina was on her way back to East Gill. She travelled alone, Valentine remaining in Town to make certain arrangements for an expedition of scientific research, charge of which had been offered to him, and in which his wife would be allowed to join. This was their first parting, a matter of a few days only. Sabrina's plan was to take up her old quarters for a couple of days at the farm, get everything ready at Hawk's Point for her husband's arrival, and for him then to join her. To require double accommodation would, she declared, cause upset to her mother's domestic arrangements; but she had also her own considerate reason for thus returning alone, a personal not a domestic one. Valentine protested; but Sabrina only laughed.

"Do," she said, "let us begin by being sensible; let us show that a newly married couple can be!"

"They will think we have quarrelled!" he objected.

"Let them! We can afford to, Val, can we not?"

The young wife made gentle merriment over the enforced separation; over him, too, so rueful at the notion that he was become again like the violently agitating suitor who, in the first days of his wooing, had flung himself in storm at her feet.

"Come, come," she said, rallying him, "I shall think presently that you are not sure of me! You forget how I am longing to prove myself a house-

wife: is not that why we are going to Hawk's Point at all? No; we shall not be complete till we have shown that we can separate just for once. I don't want to feel that I have become a parasite, but I promise that I shall miss you. Will you be satisfied with that?"

Of course she got her way; indeed, Valentine was himself open to the attraction of a short interval in those days of bliss; there would be the romance of flying back to her once more. His wife's grave affection for him, different from a passion with which he was more familiar, had captivated all that was best in him, maybe because it was a form of love of which he had never before been the recipient. It promised a new element in life, one of a daylight comradeship, that he had not foreseen from his own more passionate anticipations; and with its promise of endurance it did nothing to dull the romance of their early union. Once, at a sudden manifestation of warmth on his part, interrupting some slight employment in which she was engaged, he had seen Sabrina smile, with a world of tender mockery in her eyes.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked her.

"Of you."

"If you are thinking only of me, you are laughing at me."

"Of you," she said, "and of myself, a comfortable five or ten years hence."

"And what then?"

"When I shall be more a wife, I hope, and less a bride."

"You could not be more my wife than you are now!" he declared, too full of his passion to believe that the years held increase.

"Could I not?—how can you know? We are too busy making love, Val, to know anything really. When people are most wise, love makes itself."

"But you do own—do you not?"—he urged, "that we are 'making love!' Tell me—you tell me

so little—tell me that I am really winning your love! Is that yet true? It was not quite mine from the first.”

“Yes,” she said, “yes, I believe it to be true; but I am hungry for time to prove it. You love me too much, Val. I want your heart to settle down; mine can’t keep pace. Life is not *this*, you know.”

Her grave beauty as she looked at him was so tender and kind that the ardent lover in him was not cooled by the half-wistful restraint and prudence of her words. In these early days his boyishness of demeanour sometimes disconcerted her, causing her to declare that she was too old to be his mate.

“You are two people,” she said, “and I have not yet got you together. You do rash things needlessly; yet you seem to have a calculating mind. Some day you will fall between these two parts of yourself, and then I shall lose you.”

There had been a case in point only two days before. They were paying a visit of inspection to some mineral works where a truck, heavily laden, had by some chance been left too near the top of a steep incline; a blow from an over-shunted wagon in the rear sent it rolling. Valentine seized the situation at a glance; while others stood agape, he ran, sprang on from behind and applied the brake, even so barely averting disaster. No question of life-saving was involved when he thus risked his own. His pluck was loudly applauded, and the management thanked him. Sabrina did not.

“You might have left me a widow!” she complained, meeting him with a pale face on his return.

That it had been a rare sporting chance was his single excuse: it was the thing he could not resist. There was the man. He had strained his wrist with the exertion of holding on to the brake, and Sabrina heard with some impatience as she bandaged it his talk of the intoxicating delight of those few moments of suspense—the rush through air;

the doubt whether the brake would act; the question when to drop it and leap; the growing belief and final assurance of mastery; and at last the proud knowledge that he had pulled the thing through. She gathered that her own presence also had rather impelled than held him back, and felt that it would be necessary to cure him of thinking that she had any admiration for rash things if she was to be a safe companion for him on future expeditions.

In Town he was less likely to meet with such adventures; and her mind was free from care concerning him as she travelled down to Warringford by the afternoon express. Her preoccupation was rather on her own account: a little shyness at the meeting of relatives and friends under changed conditions, and a wonder whether poor Ronald would be away, or already on the road to an easy cure of his malady. Her doubt on that head added to her wish to get over to Hawk's Point without delay. If she could secure help, so as not to be left single-handed and solitary, she determined to move in on the morrow.

On arriving at the local junction, she had a wait of twenty minutes. The train of the Warringford and Wedport branch stood on its siding, and the few country folk who travelled by it, making sure of a sure thing, were already in their places. Sabrina delayed taking hers; till, as she walked up and down the platform she saw the face of a girl, alone in one of the compartments, turn toward her with a look of recognition.

In another moment the face, losing its first strangeness, became familiar; it was Lottie Gage.

"Why, Lottie!" she cried, "Lottie, what has brought you here? Where have you been all this time?" As she spoke her eye fell upon things which seemed to give indication of past events. "What!" she said; "you are married, then? And is this your baby?"

"Yes, miss," said Lottie, humbly, letting the one answer cover both questions.

Sabrina smiled at hearing herself thus addressed. With colour slightly raised she said—

"I am not 'miss' any longer, Lottie; I also am married now."

"Are you indeed, miss—ma'am, of course, I should say," cried Lottie, instinctively pleased at the news; it seemed to bring them nearer together again. "Well, I should never have thought it; you don't look a day different! May I ask who you are, ma'am?"

"My husband is Mr. Valentine Reddie; you would not know him; he only came to these parts after you left, and our engagement was a short one. And what is your name now, Lottie?"

"I am Mrs. Reed," said the girl.

Sabrina recognized the name. "Oh," she cried, "I am glad! So it was all right, was it? Your way of going off so suddenly made many of us very anxious. That was wrong of you! Why did you never write?"

Lottie was not good at undergoing cross-examination; she quailed a little under the searching of Sabrina's glance.

"I couldn't," she said. "I was ashamed to. And then, and then, you see"—she caught at the first straw of excuse that occurred to her—"I didn't want Dan Curtis to know."

"No news did not make your going away easier for any one who cared about you," said Sabrina, reproachfully.

"No; I'm very sorry," said the girl. "But please be kind to me, dear ma'am, now I have come. I have had a great deal of trouble to bear."

The gentle foolish face told its own tale. Lottie's was not a character one could be hard on; her beauty was that of an April day, not lasting,—grief made a wreck of it. It was pity to see already how much it had aged.

"Where are you going now?" asked Sabrina, in gentler tones.

"To Wedport."

"To your husband?"

"No; yes—to wait for him. I wrote to say I was coming. I have not seen him for a long time; oh, not for ever so long!—nor heard from him, either; so at last I had to come!"

A look of such vivid distress crossed her face, that in a moment Sabrina's belief in Lottie's domestic welfare was shaken.

"Then you are not even sure that he is there?"

"No; but he will come—I know he will! He wrote to tell me—oh, a long time back—that he was getting a home ready for me."

"Then you have not had a home yet?"

"No; not a home, it wasn't. I've been living in London."

"Do you know where you are going now?"

"I know of some lodgings in Wedport."

"But when you go there you will have nothing to do."

"No; not until he comes to me."

Her voice was so forlorn, her face so sad and wistful in its pallor, it was difficult to believe that any such thing as home lay within her prospects. Sabrina hardly liked, at this their first meeting, to make too many inquiries. Moved with pity for one so obviously helpless and astray, she offered what was the most within her power, temporary employment and companionship.

"Will you come to me, Lottie?" she asked, "for a few days, until I have settled myself? I could just manage to take you in; or you could come over from Wedport for the day."

She told the girl of her plans.

Lottie accepted the offer with eager gratitude. "Oh yes, ma'am," she said, "if I might come and work for you, it would be almost like a home-coming, already."

"Then, let it be so!" said Sabrina. "Can you be over at Hawk's Point by eleven o'clock tomorrow morning? I believe there is a carrier from Wedport who goes within a mile of the place."

Thus it was arranged, when at Warringford they parted. So the two ends of this thread of circumstance came together, and began to tie a knot that no human power could afterwards undo.



## CHAPTER XXX

### NEW LIGHT

SABRINA was the first to arrive next morning at the place of meeting. She called for the keys at Mrs. Owens', who had now moved into new quarters, and coming alone to the small bare barrack which was temporarily to be her home, herself unfastened the shutters to let in the light, and threw open doors and windows to the morning sun. For some days past Mrs. Owens had been lighting fires in preparation for her coming, but the rooms still smelt musty and damp.

All was just as Valentine Reddie had left it — the tables were strewn with the small articles, implements, and papers of which he had made daily use. From a peg hung old wearing-apparel, left there preparatory to being finally cast aside; it was, in fact, a bachelor's chamber, and a carelessly disposed one at that. Sabrina smiled leniently at all the muddle and rubbish waiting to be swept away under her dispensation.

While she was still engaged on this preliminary survey, Lottie knocked and entered.

"So you have come," said Sabrina. "You have been walking fast; sit down and rest! I shall be back in a moment; I am just going to take off my things."

But when she returned a few minutes later, Lottie was still standing gazing strangely about her. It was as though something out of a previous existence had presented itself to her eye,— some-

thing whose meaning she could not take in. Her look was too strange to escape notice.

"What is the matter?" inquired Sabrina.

Lottie turned round and looked at her, still with a dazed and puzzled air.

"He has been here!" she said at last.

"Who has been here?"

"My — my husband!"

"What makes you think so?"

"There are things of his here. That's his, and that," she pointed; she went near and touched, as though to make quite sure of them. "Oh, do you know where he is? Tell me, tell me!"

She turned round, her eyes wide with piteous inquiry, and saw Sabrina's staring at her out of a mask like death.

At last the lips opened for the words to come. "Lottie, you lie!" she whispered without breath.

The girl shrank back, terrified, putting up her hands as if to fend off something she saw coming.

"No, no," she pleaded, "indeed I do not! They *are* his!"

"You are not married to him!" cried Sabrina, terribly, in a wild voice of anger and despair.

"No, no, I'm not; I know I'm not!" cried the startled girl, her defences breaking down before so tremendous an assault; "but I almost am! he almost promised me he would. He gave me this ring, he gave me his name, he gave me everything he could give me to make me seem honest in folks' eyes; he almost did marry me; and he wrote to me that he was going to make a home for me. Perhaps he will marry me after all when he comes back, when he sees what I've brought him. You won't tell, you won't tell anybody that I'm not married to him! because it wouldn't be quite true; for I *am* married to him: I must be — loving him as I do! Oh, dear Miss Sabrina, you won't tell of me? Say you won't tell!"

During the whole of this impassioned outburst,

this prayer to her pity, her sense of mercy and justice, Sabrina had stood without moving, gazing into the other's eyes. Alas, she saw only truth there, inexorable truth, too simple for falsehood to hide under; and yet she demanded to have it verified, to hear it restated, till her brain could take in its full meaning. She came near and caught the girl hard by the hands, holding her as though she feared she might try to escape.

"Lottie," she whispered, "Lottie, tell me! Is this true?"

"Yes; it is true. Don't punish me!"

"True as God sees you?"

"Yes, oh yes!"

"True even if there is no God to see you? True, even if nothing else is true in all the world?"

"Oh, miss, don't look so; you frighten me!" cried the girl. "It is true; God help me, it is! I've told nobody else of it but you!"

"How can you prove it's true?" cried Sabrina, desperately.

The girl looked round her all lost for a word. "If you don't believe me, I can't," she said at last. "But why should I tell you what's not true, — you who've always been so good to me? And, yes, I can prove it! I've got his own writing where he says — See here — where he says — yes; I've got it — where he tells me he's making a home for me, and that I've only got to wait. Only I couldn't wait any longer, you see."

She drew out and handed to Sabrina the letter she had received. Sabrina had but to glance at the writing; she did not need to read the words.

"Yes," she said, "yes, I see you are telling the truth." A sudden fit of loathing seized hold of her; she shuddered, and became ice.

"And you won't think it's because I'm really bad that he hasn't married me," Lottie went on, "or that I don't love him enough. No; it's only because I'm not good enough for him; I don't know enough.

You see, he's quite different from anything I thought he was; he's a gentleman born, and that made all the difference. But even if I'd known it I should have loved him all the same; I couldn't do anything else. Oh, you will forgive me, you at least will forgive me, ma'am, for you've always been a kind friend!"

"What did you say?" inquired Sabrina, scarcely attending, when at last the girl paused in her pleading.

"I ask you to be kind to me, only that; not to cast me off as everybody else would."

Lottie's tears now flowed freely—not passionately, but miserably, penitently: she was so sorry for herself, and yet, as she said, she could not have done differently.

Sabrina set her gaze as though she would draw out Fate's inmost meaning from that dim tear-stained visage with its wrecked childish beauty. She read there the traces of love, of passion, of meek surrender, of a forlorn and desperate devotion, and for all the difference of their two natures, she could understand now, and could sympathize. A woman before she is married argues of the unknown in terms of the soul; a married woman feels and thinks with body and soul. It is as though the early ideals had changed substance, had stepped down from their pure white pedestals and become flesh; and as flesh and blood transcend in beauty mere stone, so also are they exposed to a more terrible pollution. Their beauty may grow corrupt and rot; forms of stone can only crumble and break. So is the tragedy of married life greater than all the unmated tragedies of the world.

Lottie stood like a culprit, sorrowfully weeping; and what could Sabrina do or say to condemn or comfort her?

"Oh, Lottie," she said, "you have done a dreadful thing, a dreadful thing to yourself!" And to her own case the same words applied; she, too, had

done a dreadful thing. She saw it now as something immovable towering dark above her, blocking her way, shutting out the whole horizon of life; what was it possible to do? She was helpless in this tremendous grip of Fate.

So she stood, thinking desperately, trying to get away from herself—yet into herself, to know quite clearly what it was that she must do. She did not speak; time ceased to exist. Presently she saw Lottie move from where she stood, cross the room, and with a sudden tender movement of love and grief, hide her face in one of the rough working garments that hung behind the door.

“Oh, I couldn't help it! I couldn't help it!” came the words in a muffled cry.

Sabrina's thoughts had hitherto been concerned with the inward aspect alone, with her own hidden experiences and emotions. Now, at that sight of the fair head resting on the canvas coat, memory and a vision of outward happenings grew quick in her; they dealt her a new wound.

“Lottie,” she said, “he used to come to you over the downs, did he not—over by Amesbay?”

“Yes; he did that at first.”

“Every evening he used to come, and you used to go and meet him, when it was thought you were still with your aunt?”

“Oh yes; but don't blame me for it too much! I couldn't miss meeting him when I loved him so well.”

“And he came, he came regularly, did he not? And once you could not go, and I took a note for you, and put it under a stone. My God, I did that! I did that!”

“You always were kind to me. Yes; I deceived you too.”

“And then,” went on Sabrina, “then—he stopped coming?”

“Yes; no. He hadn't been for quite a long time, and I couldn't bear to be away from him,

and so I went where he took me; that was how it was."

Sabrina's face had grown stern. "And then?"

"Then I was with him for a little while in London, and then he went away, and I only heard from him now and then. I never saw him again after he once went away. But he wrote to me and helped me, and I wrote to him; and then, when I told him what was going to happen, he got me this ring, and sent me to lodge with quite respectable folk: I've been with them ever since. It was there he told me to call myself Mrs. Reed; I didn't do it till he gave me leave. Don't you think that I am almost married to him, when he lets me use his name, though I know it isn't his real name?"

Sabrina could bear no more. "Oh, Lottie," she cried, "I can't listen to you! Go away! Go away! Don't come again till I send for you! There, you needn't be frightened, I don't mean what you think; I'm not angry with you. I could kneel down and pray to be forgiven for all this pain and misery that's come on you, as though it were my own doing. Only go—go! Don't wait now; put on your bonnet and go! I must be alone; I can't think or do anything."

She hastened the trembling girl, lending assistance as she spoke.

"Oh, Miss Sabrina—ma'am, I mean," cried Lottie, lifting a scared face, "you aren't sending me away for good and all, are you?"

"No; not for good. You shall come back again."

"Will you kiss me, ma'am? I shall believe it then."

Sabrina, with a sudden cry, threw open her arms. Lottie fell to her breast sobbing, satisfied in the midst of her grief.

"Oh, Lottie dear, pray for me!" cried Sabrina. "I will do all I can."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE TUG OF WAR

SABRINA'S instinct to secure solitude had been too imperative to resist; the strain of concealed knowledge had become unbearable. A mind in agony turns to the body for deliverance, there are times when to cry out is the only safeguard of reason. So it seemed to her now: she must be free to move, and think, and utter her thoughts aloud, so as to get respite from the horror which had suddenly overwhelmed her.

Yet when the relief came reaction had already set in; tremulousness of limb and a faint sense of sickness were the only physical signs of the ordeal through which she had passed. Instantly her mind grew strong; she was free now from acting a part; eyes of piteous revealing ignorance had no longer to be duped; thought could go straight to its mark; pride and scorn, love, indignation, and pity could meet and strive together for the mastery of her will.

It was her will more than her heart over which the controversy now joined. What she *willed* to do, not what she wished, was the question. Strange separation! — almost a juggling of words; and yet a whole gulf seemed to lie between those two aims; antagonistic, they remained contrary, not to be reconciled, opposers of each other like the doctrines of predestination and free will — a manifest contradiction; and yet in her brain both lived and fought and struggled the one with the other. Protean in

their changes, she could keep them neither fixed nor apart.

What she willed to do, not what she wished. Surely her will was to do right — or was it to satisfy pride? Or, then, if she wished to forgive, was that in her power? She could not yet even forgive herself. But there was one, at least, who did not need her forgiveness, against whom she had no claim. Had that one, then, any claim against her? If she chose to admit it — yes! She must: she stood too deeply committed to deny it. Fact after fact rose up to accuse her; unwittingly she had played her part; but now she knew what her share had been, and it was of now that she had to judge. She, without strong need of her own, had stepped in and supplanted one of humbler degree, a girl whom she had befriended and helped to her own undoing, of whose vanishing hope and vain expectation and final misery she had unknowingly been the cause; in the way of whose happiness she herself was still the greatest obstacle. The thought of it sent her to the dust. And it was against Lottie, poor frail, foolish Lottie, that she had done all this! Had her rival been one of less feeble substance, one more strong to maintain herself and her own cause, she could better have endured it. But Lottie, by her looks, her words, her humility, her trustfulness, her prayer to be forgiven, her expectation of aid — Lottie, by all these things had disarmed and left her weak, defenceless of her own right. There could not be right for both — not right of possession.

In small things constitutionally slow to act, Sabrina was capable in emergency of large resolves. She had sent Lottie away because for the moment her presence was unendurable; she determined now to recall her and face the matter out in all its bearings. Going to the house near the main road, at which the carrier would call on his return, she left there a missive which might by good chance reach Lottie that evening. The message,



kindly worded, bade her return at the earliest opportunity, and bring her belongings with her. At the same time she despatched a telegram to her husband, asking him to come if possible on the morrow. It spared her the writing of the letter which in the ordinary course he would be expecting.

Full of her purpose, she now set herself with energy to the task of making everything ready for his arrival. Having dismissed Lottie, she was obliged to do the work single-handed. She had not gone far when she was met by a domestic difficulty which she had not foreseen; the accommodation in each tenement was limited to a couple of rooms, and the furniture of these was in proportion to their modest dimensions. The rooms had been cleared by their former occupants, and nothing now remained but the few articles which Valentine had hired for his own use. She had brought with her some of her mother's household linen, together with a few things necessary to domestic comfort; but, in spite of these additions, the furnishing was of the most meagre description, suggestive rather of a few days' camping-out than of a settlement, or even a fortnight's occupancy.

Sabrina paused, discouraged, in the midst of her labours. The house was her husband's; he had as much right to come to it as she to go; but she was very reluctant by any overt act to anticipate the breach which might result upon their meeting; she must at least stay and let him hear from her own lips the cause of her departure. Then she remembered that in the museum, the second room across the passage, was a small couch or chair-bed, piled up with books, bird-cases, and general litter. This supplied her want. She set to work at once, feverishly preparing it, although it would not be wanted till the following night. Occupation alone could make the inevitable time of waiting seem tolerable; and though she had toiled almost continuously since Lottie's departure in the morning, she would not

allow herself time for relaxation, even when the failing light caused interruption and a search for candles.

Night brought a chill into the air; she closed up the windows that had all day stood open. It was then nearly eight o'clock; she was still busy with her preparations in the small museum, when she heard the opening of the outer door and a quick step in the passage. In another moment her husband entered, all glowing and out of breath in his haste to meet her.

The event had given Sabrina no breathing space, no time to think or prepare herself; he was there, in another moment she would be in his arms. A table bearing a couple of candles stood for a barrier between them. She blanched, gazing at him speechless.

His eager laugh of pleasure changed as he caught sight of her face.

"My God! What has happened?" he cried. "Is anything the matter?"

Checked for an instant, again he advanced with open arms.

"Yes," she said, desperately to the point, letting the word go: "I have seen Lottie Gage."

That name held him; he stopped dead. He also gazed with blanched face into hers.

"Ah!" There was a long pause. "And that means?"

"It means—that I know."

Again neither of them spoke for a time. Reddie stood eyeing her compassionately.

"Well, you know, then," he said at last. "Some one has told you, I suppose? Had you asked me I could have told you, too."

"Do women dream of asking their husbands things like that?"

"Not if they are wise," said Reddie.

"Then, if they do—these women who are not wise—" said Sabrina, with rising scorn, "do their husbands dream of telling them the truth?"

"Not if they are wise," said Reddie, again; "but they may—if they love much. I should have told you."

"So you would take credit for that! But, apart from any question of wisdom, do you not think that a wife has already the right to know?"

"Not everything; not of things which came before—which could not concern her. Ah! dear wife, don't look so bitterly at me! To you, from the beginning, I told the truth about myself."

"No doubt; it was safe to tell me then," she answered in cold disdain, "since it is only now that I know what it means."

"Ah, yes!" he said with bitter tenderness; "and because you were ignorant then, do you think you have the more right to punish me now?"

"There is no question of punishment," she answered; "it is the mere fact—the relation in which we now stand, you and I."

"Whatever it be, you are still my wife."

The word stung her to sudden anger. "Can I even be sure of that!" she cried. "Who is this man, this 'Frederick Reed, stonemason'?—the name and the calling have a familiar ring!—who lets a woman bear his name, who maintains her, who bids her wait and promises her a home; who gives her a wedding ring that she may say she is his wife and be believed? Why should I not believe her too? If you have lied to her, why should you not also lie to me? Do you expect me to believe anything you say now?"

"You will believe me," he said gently, "though you may wish not to. You, Sabra,—the only woman in the world I love,—you are legally my wife."

"You say that to remind me that I have no escape," she replied in a dull accent of pain. "Yes, I am your wife, but she has a claim I have not; she is the mother of your child. Yet you hardly pretend to think of her."

He caught eagerly at what he believed to be in

her mind; it was his axiom that all women must be jealous.

"I swear to you," he said, "that, except for that obligation which I must continue to discharge, she is nothing to me now; she never was to me what you became from the first time we ever met. Since I set eyes on you, you have been my one and only desire. You should not find it hard to forgive what happened before you came into my life."

His voice was tender and low, he had allowed nothing she said to anger him; in the midst of contention and strife he was her wooer still.

She had seated herself, discovering an utter weariness now that her brain only, not her body, was employed. He came and stood near her, seeking to touch her hand.

"Beloved," he said, "you break your heart for an idea that is not possible. You do not know what men are; till the one woman comes who has power to guide them right, their lives won't stand looking into as yours will. Believe me, that since I saw you I have loved one woman only—that before I allowed myself to speak to you of love I had forsaken all others to follow you. Will you not believe that?"

"That you forsook her for me? Yes, you seem to have a genius for doing what is wrong!"

"If I wronged her, still I have not wronged you."

"Oh!" she cried, "did you not marry me?"

"Say also, Sabra, have I not loved you enough?"

A physical horror came upon her; her lips grew white.

"Too much!" She struggled from the thought.

"Have I the less cause to complain?"

"Yet I told you what I had been. Through you I have become a different man. From that which you condemn you saved me."

"Do you think that you were worth so much saving, at such a cost;—she and I to be sacrificed

for you? Are you sure that you feel saved now?" She had not spoken so bitterly before.

"Ah, you are too cruel!" he cried. "Whatever wrong I committed I have done my best to make good, more, far more, than many would have done in a like case. And if she is satisfied, why should you cry out?"

"Oh," said Sabrina, "I should be glad indeed to hear that she is satisfied! Sometimes, it seems, she writes to you. Do you answer her, ever?"

"I have answered her when there has been anything to answer. Here; you can see for yourself! I will hide nothing from you; this is the last I had from her. She makes no complaint; there is not a word to suggest that I have left unpaid any debt that was due."

Sabrina said, merely looking at the letter, not reading it, "She was crying, poor thing, when she wrote this." She stood up in a sudden heat of impatience; the memory of Lottie as she had seen her last came clearly back to mind. "Listen to me!" she said. "The past is nothing, it is dead. Of what lives I know more than you. This is what I saw, only to-day, in this room: a woman, standing over there with her face pressed to that old coat of yours, crying over it, kissing it, comforting herself with it, because it was once yours! And she has been waiting for weeks to hear from you, for weeks, for this home of which you write to her, and in which she believes. And she does not complain of you: she does not think hardly of you; she thinks that what you do is right! And if I had said to her, 'Go! do not come here again to trouble me!' if I had said, 'I am his wife and you can be nothing to him now,' — she would have gone — do you understand? She would have *gone!* Now, can you not see what I see? Oh, my God! are you so blind?"

She ceased, and, in her agitation, began to walk up and down; twice she passed him, seeming to forget his presence, then turned from the far end of

the chamber and faced him once more. Her anger burned high as, from a distance, she looked at him.

"You do not—you do not really mind!" she cried; "that is the intolerable thing, the thing that divides us most! You only mind because *I* mind! You had a quiet conscience; you were happy. You had put out of sight all this suffering that you had caused: yes! you thought you had done with it; for you it simply did not exist! While, for me, it is the only thing that does! I tell you, Val, that the woman whose tears are on this letter stands between us all the more because you do not—do not *mind!* Ah! I could almost forgive you if you could only see how base that is!"

Valentine, too, was on his feet now. "Be silent!" he cried; "you have no right to speak to me like that!"

"I have not! I have not!" she said; "for I am not truly your wife."

"It seems to me you are mad!" he broke out, losing patience at last. "Ah! I could not guess how cruel and unreasonable a good woman might be made by jealousy! I did not know you, it seems."

"Nor do you now, if you speak of jealousy!" she answered. "Do you think I am envious of her? I should be low, indeed, if I were that now! You tell me I have no right to speak; let me go, then, and I will be silent enough to please even you: I promise you I will tell nothing!"

"What is the good of your saying these things?" said Reddie, restraining himself once more. "Merely to anger me? That is a poor triumph, my dear; is there any use in that?"

"No," she answered; "but I wish you to understand. Let me ask you only this: had you known of me what you know now—how 'unreasonably' I should feel and act in such a case,—would you have risked your happiness by marrying me?"

"I would have married you," cried Reddie, "though I had to go to hell for it afterwards!"

"But I," she said, "had I known all—would not have married you. You spoke once of the payment which Fate exacts merely as the inevitable result of what has gone before. Can you complain now that it has come your way?"

"Payment need not be enforced usury," said Valentine. "No doubt we do pay, you and I."

"I mean to," Sabrina said.

"Well,—if knowledge is only to work mischief," he replied, "concealment were indeed true wisdom!"

"So you thought," said Sabrina; "and now you have to pay for thinking so. Is not that just?"

Reddie looked at her sharply, suspiciously. "What are you meaning to do?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing rash!" answered his wife, with a slight inflection of scorn; "nothing the world need know. I am going home for a while; no one knows yet that you are here. You are already under an agreement that binds you; it turns out that I cannot go with you,—that is all. Afterwards, when you return six months hence,—if you wish it, I will keep house for you; we still have interests enough in common, and I shall be glad if I may be of use. Don't expect more from me, Valentine; you may possibly have to take less."

Reddie, looking at his wife, read in her cold face the full meaning of her words. Again anger got the better of him.

"Sabrina, this is wickedness, sheer pride!" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps," she answered. "I do not find humiliation a very easy thing to bear."

Valentine was gentle again in his reply.

"It is not asked of you," he said. "You cannot be humiliated where you have done no wrong."

"I am a supplanter," she said; "I have to remember that."

He sighed despairingly; further argument seemed so useless.

"Listen," he said, "I will do anything to give you present comfort. You shall go home; I will take you there myself, to-morrow. And then,—tell your mother of all this,—consult her!"

He spoke urgently; faith in the advice of tender old age hung a sudden star in his sky.

"You will tell her all, dear, all; keep back nothing of what you know; yes, I would submit to be judged by her—to wait even till you learned to see as she saw."

Sabrina fixed hard eyes at him, saying nothing; a sudden fear laid hold of her, the fear lest her mother had known, had been told, and, satisfied, had kept silence. She feared that blend of Christian resignation and worldly wisdom which summed up her parent's view of life.

"Perhaps I shall not tell her," she said, an undertone of defiance marking the utterance.

"Then I shall!" he replied resolutely; and Sabrina drew a sharp breath of relief.

"Let us say no more about this now," he went on, and, coming nearer to her, added in a tone of tender regret, "Can you not, dearest, say one kind word to me to-night, before we part? It commits you to nothing. After the first short parting of our married life, what a meeting this is! Who could have believed it possible?"

"Who could?" she murmured, looking back over that gulf of a few short hours.

"Remember, Sabra, my love, at all events, has not changed. Your message to-day brought me on wings; it was so natural that you should send for me and that I should come; how could I keep away? I thought of you,—of this, as my home."

He looked round the room as he spoke; his eye fell on the provisional accommodation she had there made for him. How coldly she had foreseen everything! It struck a chill to his heart.



Sabrina read his mind, and without compunction was still able to feel pity for him.

"I hope you will be comfortable here," she said in a low voice. "I have done all I could. Will you have something?—something to eat, I mean, though I fear there is very little in the house."

He came to divine one cause of her manifest weariness. "*You* must!" he said; "you have not eaten, to-day."

"I will look after myself," she answered. "Will you have it here, or over in the other room?"

He elected to stay in the quarters she had arranged for him; his wish to give ease to her mind was abundantly evident; he refrained even from offers of assistance, remaining there to unpack, and coming out presently to find a table all ready laid for him. The closing of the further door as he entered indicated his wife's withdrawal for the night; there they were to be, two solitaries under one roof.

Sabrina crossed the entrance-way to the sitting-room which before had been Mrs. Owens'. She looked at her watch; it was then half-past nine. Utterly weary, she sat down to rest; all excitement had gone from her brain, a dull bodily ache that remained told the stress of the last few hours. It was a comfort to her not to move, merely to lean over the table and let the weight of her head lie on her arms. She sat thus for the better part of an hour; wishing to go and lie down, she had not the energy to rise. So little initiative remained to her that, with no other bidding than her own will, she might have remained there half the night.

Outside the window she heard a step; a low tap sounded at the door. She went to open it. There stood Lottie Gage.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### UNDER ONE ROOF

WITHOUT a word Sabrina drew the girl into the room she had just quitted, and shut the door.

"So you have come back?" she said in a half whisper, though there was little chance of her voice being heard elsewhere. "You were quite right; but why at such an hour?"

"I couldn't wait," said Lottie, in a miserable pleading tone. "I was so lonely, I had to come! I heard the mail-cart would be going this way, so I came by that. Did you really mean me to come?"

"Yes, yes; sit down and warm yourself; you are shivering! The fire is almost out, but I can soon light it again. Is it very chilly outside?"

Lottie was wrapped in a shawl, disposed in such a manner as partly to relieve her arms of the weight that was in them. This she now unfastened with precaution, peeped in to see if all was well, and finally disclosed her burden.

"He's asleep," she said. "You meant I was to bring him too, didn't you, ma'am?"

She turned to Sabrina with a look of shy expectancy, of timid invitation; she wished her baby, as one of those fortunate beings to whom love at first sight is due, to be admired, and praised.

Sabrina stood, looking down on the two in a cold wonder—at herself—at them—striving to detach her mind from the actual circumstances in which all were now involved as in a net, trying

to remember what she had really meant in telling Lottie to come.

"Yes," she said at last; "I meant you both to come."

And as she spoke she realized that a reversal of the bidding that had brought them was no longer possible; she could not send them away now. Fate had manifestly taken up the conduct of affairs, and the event no longer lay in her hands to decide.

The sense that this had come about through her own instrumentality, yet without her willing it, cleared Sabrina's mind for the part she had to play, for the deliberate act of renunciation which she had until now only dimly foreseen. The situation seemed indeed to make a fitting parallel to that which had led her into this strait. Fate, working through her hands, had brought desolation and desertion on another; now it would perhaps reverse the act. Her part was but to stand aside, and mark the event.

In her present state she could recognize no law save that of her own feelings; and the call to abide by it seemed the more sacred and imperative, because there was yet a struggle going on in her breast against it. She knew that she was loved by this man, perhaps with all the love of which he was capable; and she was not yet so divided from the past as not to feel a response when she stood on the verge of annulling her own claim in favour of another. She felt the crisis in her blood, and feared lest it might presently affect her brain, and alter her resolution.

She allowed herself no time for further thought. Before her she saw only a weary woman, flagging and dispirited, nursing an infant asleep, and, in spite of her weariness, proud and tender towards its cause. Pain seized her heart-strings.

"Lottie," she said abruptly; "come, I will put you to bed; it is very late. Give me the child! Yes; he looks as if he were a fine, beautiful boy;

but I cannot see him properly till he has opened his eyes."

"Ah, he has his father's eyes!" murmured the fond mother.

Sabrina looked at the puckered flesh of the shut-up lids, and wondered if indeed this longing to see what they concealed were not, after all, the jealousy she had so passionately denied.

Lottie submitted readily to the direction of the stronger will.

"Oh, that's comfort!" she sighed, yielding her worn-out body at last to the embrace of the cool sheets, with her baby cradled in pillows at her side. "How tired I am! I didn't know it till now."

"Promise that you will sleep, then, if I tell you something before I go," said Sabrina; "perhaps I have good news for you."

"If it's about him, I shall sleep better," said the girl, eagerly. "It's only the thought of never seeing him again keeps me wakeful."

"You will see him again to-morrow, that is certain," answered Sabrina. "He will be here."

Lottie's face became luminous, a thing of beauty. Sabrina turned away; its joy struck her a blow.

"Oh, ma'am, will he indeed? I couldn't believe it if any one else told me; but I know what you say's true, and I know it's all your doing. Oh, you have been good to me, you have indeed!"

"No, no," said Sabrina; "don't say that! We don't know anything about it yet. Wait till you know before you begin thanking me. You will not be frightened if he comes, even if he is a little angry with you? He may be."

"No; for I shall know you sent him to me. And then — you will be here?"

"Perhaps not. I had better leave you alone together at first. But he will know it is all my doing, your being here. Yes, he will know that. If he forgets, you must remind him; remember that, Lottie — that it is not your fault. What are

you thinking of?" she added, seeing a new light in the girl's face; and Lottie smiled out.

"I'm thinking," she said gladly, "that it doesn't so much matter what he thinks of me now; he'll see his boy, and he'll have to be proud of him. Oh, don't you think that'll make it all right, ma'am, when he sees my boy?"

Sabrina bowed her face into shade, as she arranged the bed-clothes over that unconscious pair.

"It ought to make it so, Lottie," she said; "but don't go thinking too much; say good night, now, and sleep!"

Once more Lottie reached up her arms for an embrace, which the other could not refuse.

"I don't feel that I'm so very wicked when you kiss me," murmured the girl, in the tone of one waiting for reassurance.

"No, no, you are not!" Sabrina replied soothingly.

She could say no more; taking up the light, she passed quickly into the adjoining room.

It was past eleven o'clock; the fire had sunk to a faint glimmer, a damp chilliness seemed to hang about the walls. She put on cloak and hat, and began noiselessly to make preparations for departure. Her flitting was not to be yet, but she wished to have everything ready, and off her mind before seeking repose. Placing a few articles of personal use in a small hand-bag, she put out of sight, in the boxes which she had begun to unpack, all her larger belongings; then, having tidied the room of its litter of work, she sat down to the table and began writing.

But though other things requiring a mere mechanical performance had been easy, this new task proved difficult beyond anticipation. Thought and the written word would not go together; no sooner was a sentence written than it ceased to convey her meaning: she destroyed it, and began

again. A second and a third attempt were no better; she simply grew more utterly weary of the strain while no nearer to what she wished to express.

At last she broke off, and gave up in despair. "I am trying to say two things," she told herself; "and they are not for me to decide. What right have I to interfere? I am an interloper! To say nothing at all is best; that, at least, will be a true statement of what I mean."

She looked at the clock. It was then past twelve. As a mere matter of prudence she felt that she must now take some rest. Thinking was done with; her decision was irrevocably made. A deck-chair, spread out to its fullest extent, would give her all the rest she needed. Only when she had put out the light did it occur to her that if she slept at all she might not awake till too late. To make sure of an early rising it was necessary that she should open the outer shutters.

She went softly out, leaving the door ajar, and, having arranged matters, returned. Scarcely had she re-entered the house, when her ear was attracted by a sound in one of the rooms upon her left: the creak of an inner door being quietly opened. This was followed, after a while, by a touch on the handle of the one leading into the passage. She started, and braced herself for the encounter.

Presently the door opened; all was pitch darkness. She heard strong breathing that stopped and then went on again; her husband had halted at the threshold to listen before venturing further.

Thus they stood side by side, divided only by the night. Had Valentine reached out a hand in her direction he must have touched her: they were so close that she could almost feel the warmth of his body, the stir of his breath. The faint pad of an unshod foot on the flagged floor told that he had advanced another step, and paused again.

All at once his breath broke in a sigh, tender,

emotional, charged with passion — a sound she knew well. He spoke; so near were the secretly uttered words it seemed almost impossible to believe him unaware of her presence.

“Oh, my darling, I must, I must come to you!”

Her mind became illumined; he was on his way to her, to seek a reconciliation. She need only reach out her hand to his to be clasped, and drawn to his breast, to become again his wife, and win back all which she had intended for ever to renounce. Reaction had set in; she had not repented of her resolve, but her spirit was dull and heavy; the flame of her resentment had died down; she was cold, she was lonely; and she had seen and held in her arms the crown of another woman's love, a thing which atoned, surely, for all the shame and misery that had gone before. Yes, for that other there was compensation now, an object in life, a source of happiness of which none could deprive her. Lottie had that; but what had *she*, out of all this wreck of her life and prospects, to call her own?

Probably at no time since her marriage had Sabrina felt so passionately the right and the need to possess as she did now, and she had but to lift a finger to secure the satisfaction of her claim. She saw even, with a sort of terror, the delicious joy of abandoning all her pride and scruples in order to assure herself of that love which she was on the point of casting away, to surrender body and soul and reason to the guidance of the husband who, according to Scripture itself, is the woman's head. That, surely, was a woman's ultimate right — the right of her own limitations; it was her nature; was she not justified in that? She knew that the world and religion would approve.

But even while that struggle went on in her, she saw that matters had come to the supreme test which she had worked to bring about; and that it was not for her to decide. She had resigned all

claim : Valentine must learn first his own freedom, and by his conduct then, she would let his cause and her own be judged.

With cold resolve she fought back those instincts of her woman's nature which cried to be satisfied, and let the opportunity pass by.

She heard Valentine, moving softly from her side, go forward on a vain quest. He entered the sitting-room. For a moment, as she waited and listened, she felt tempted to follow, ready to be there in case of need ; but as she realized all that the next few moments held of disastrous shame and discovery, the position became too much for her endurance. As one fighting for air in which to breathe, she turned from where she stood, and leaving the door wide, made her escape into the night.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

THE following evening at the Castle Arms, Giles the rabbit man spoke to having met Mrs. Reddie on the downs in the grey hour of dawn.

"Well, now, that's strange," said Long John; "she must be at the farm still, then. I heard tell she was over at Hawk's Point expecting Mr. Reddie down. But what an hour to be out, eh, neighbours?"

"Ay," said Giles, "and it did give me a turn to see her, coming like a ghost there out of the mist. 'Oh, you been at that trick again, have you?' thinks I, for I know by now who it was got at my traps last year. Mr. David he just asked me the number I reckoned to have lost, and paid for 'em, so I said no more about it. But, seeing her up at that hour, naturally I'd my fears, and I didn't say a very pleasant 'Good morning.' I'd taled half a dozen rabbits already, and sighting her, thinks I, at once, 'What about my traps?'"

"Did she say nothing to 'ee, Giles?"

"Never a word; looked strange at first, as if she didn't know me. And then, as if the sight of them rabbits was bad for her conscience, she gave a queer fetch to her breath, and turned off and ran sharp down the hill. No, she never answered me when I spoke."

"And did you find any traps tampered with, Giles?" inquired one of his auditors.

"Now, that's the cur'est thing about it:—no, I

didn't, not one! Either she'd not come on 'em, or she hadn't had time. I watched her go on down to the farm, and then I see Mr. David meet her in the field half-way. And that's all I know."

"Well," said Long John, "'tis plain she be still there, visiting. She's always been strange and wandering in her ways ever since she first come; but you'd 'a thought matrimony ought to 'a settled her. It's a pity, now, don't ye think, neighbours, Mrs. Warham's health being what it is, and old Farmer Lorry so laid by, that they couldn't have fixed matters for her to stay on there for good. But David, not being a marrying man, stopped all chance of that. It's a real pity, though; she'd 'a done nicely for 'n."

So, by general consent, the matter stood. Hawk's Point giving the world no news of sudden arrivals and departures, Sabrina's reappearance at the farm caused no further comment in the neighbourhood. Could Mrs. Warham have realized that, there would have been more comfort during the ensuing days both for mother and daughter.

Youth is regarded as the age of passion, and for those who find existence summed up in the activity of the senses, this may be true; but the age of reason does not necessarily follow on the dulling of the emotions, nor is it to be found where feelings have merely acquired the indomitable force of habit. The main difference between the passions of youth and old age is that those of the former are transient and subject to disillusion, while those of the latter have become irremediable and permanent.

Mrs. Warham could not, even in her youth, have been described as a woman of hot blood, yet all her life she had harboured a guilty passion, to which the main tragedy of her history and the division of sympathy between herself and her daughter owed their origin, — a passion for respectability.

Sabrina's unsanctioned return to the Monastery

Farm was the signal for Mrs. Warham metaphorically to draw down the blinds as though the house contained a death. That she was in great trouble the young wife had owned at their first meeting; it did not take long for her to know from her mother's soft severe aspect that she was also in disgrace. Seclusion had not freed Mrs. Warham from those social conventions of which her manner of life made her independent; for her the world was still an inquisition of eyes and tongues; publicity falling on a woman from whatever cause argued contributory indiscretion, if not immodesty, on her part; to be even questioned before that tribunal was less a misfortune than a fault. And here, under her own roof, was the case of a wife who had been married to her husband barely six weeks, and was back again without him.

The constrained welcome and the hostile silence which greeted Sabrina's return, so different from the peace she needed, hastened a plain statement, but did not make the talk easier. Barely had the case been put when the antagonism of their views became apparent.

"My dear, my dear," began Mrs. Warham, all in a hurry, "you must go back to him! You ought never to have come away!"

"But it was impossible," cried the girl, "to stay *then*. I must at least have time to think, to know how I really feel! Surely you would not deny me that right?"

"Time can make no difference; it is your duty to go back to him;—not for his sake, for your own. I am thinking of you, my child, and of what people will say."

"What they may say," answered Sabrina, "cannot alter my present need; I want to get away from all that has happened until I can be sure of myself. Is not home the right place,—the home I can still feel is mine? Was I not right to come to you?"

"Yes, dear, quite, quite right!"

And thereat to serve its purpose, the gentle heart opened to her with a mothering sweetness that she had seldom experienced before. On that quiet breast she might lie and receive comfort and instruction; but no equal exchange of thought between them was possible; the solicitous heart that beat there had no intelligence outside its own code of morals. Sabrina spoke, and knew that she was not heard; listened herself, only to receive shock after shock of illuminating intelligence, and to find in the reasons given fresh cause for recoil from the course advocated. And again and again, with or without argument, one first step toward the remedy was urged; she must, without delay, go back to her husband's roof.

"But," she said at last, letting it for the first time appear by her tone as a thing even probable, "if I decide not to? What then?"

She was not prepared for the blind directness of the answer that came then.

"Oh, child! do you not see that in delaying submission you may be sending him back to that other one?"

"You think," said Sabrina, with keen suddenness, "you think, then, that—but for me—he might—go back? And if he does or does not, is all the responsibility mine?"

"You cannot avoid being responsible; you are his wife."

"You mean—you think—that my keeping away might send him back to her? He says that he loves only me."

"It might be so; yes, it is strange, but men are made so: do not let that harden your mind against him. Remember, Sabrina, a wife's first duty is to forgive."

"Ah," said the girl. "I can in time, I do not doubt, forgive him the wrong he has done me; but what right have I to help him to forgive himself

the wrong he has done to another? How can I relieve him of that debt?"

"That is not your concern; it lies with his own conscience."

"Yet you say that I am responsible! Oh, mother, are *all* men like this?"

"Most men, my dear, till they find good wives. What you are called on to forgive now is no great exception to what many before you have had to bear."

"But perhaps I am not a good wife."

"You can become one. Marriage is a holy state."

"Can it be holy to one who finds it has been profaned?"

"That may cause you pain, but it does not undo the bond. You must go back to him, my dear, if you are to have any peace of mind. And trust me, —for I know, —when you are once more together you will forget, and you will teach him, too, to forget, the evil of the past." Mrs. Warham flushed faintly as she spoke in the loyal resignation of her own experience. "To a true wife," she said, "the possession of her husband's love blots out every past offence; and against you, as a wife, there has been none. You know that since your marriage Valentine has been true to you; you said that he had not even seen her."

Sabrina had not yet told all. "No," she said, "he had not — not when I left him. But I know that he has since."

"How do you know that?" cried Mrs. Warham, falling suddenly into fresh alarm.

"I knew, when I left him, that he was going to her."

"Going to her? You knew of it? — because you were leaving him?"

"Practically because of that. I could have prevented him; but I did not."

"And knowing that, you left him? Oh, Sabrina, *you* call yourself a wife!"

Mrs. Warham's last wish was to hear acceptance of the implied accusation. Her daughter's quiet answer struck consternation into her heart.

"No," was the reply, "I do not call myself a wife; I do not know that I have any right to the name. That is why I left him, that is why I am here."

"Do you mean," cried Mrs. Warham, aghast, "that he was married before you knew him?"

"That is how I feel in the matter; but I do not doubt that I am legally his wife. If that contents you, mother, I tell you it does not content me. It is the thing I find hardest to bear."

Mrs. Warham listened to her no more. "I shall write and ask your husband to come here at once," she said.

"Of course," answered Sabrina, "if you wish to see him, I can go away."

"Do you mean that if he comes you will not stay?"

"Not willingly; it was to be away from him that I came."

"But if you go," cried the widow, seeing already the complete frustration of her plan—"if you go when he comes, what will people think?"

"Probably they will think just what you most fear—something not very far from the truth. Dear mother, do not be angry with me, or think me ungrateful: I am not, indeed I am not! You are free to do as you think best, but I must be free also; and he, too, must be left free now to say whether he can accept the conditions on which alone my return to him is possible."

Her mother looked at her suspiciously. "What conditions?" she inquired.

And Sabrina's answer, so quietly given, "Not to be his wife," made clear at last how diametrically their views were opposed.

Mrs. Warham spoke then from the bitterness of her soul.

“God, to punish me,” she said, “has given me a rebellious child.” She rose feebly, and refusing her daughter’s proffered aid, passed slowly to the solitude of her own room.

Thus did mother and daughter stand more deeply divided than at first. With them it was as it had always been; untoward and tragic events, the ill-effects of which fell on both, while making them more tenderly preoccupied each with the other’s welfare, failed to establish a bond of union and understanding between them. On the elder woman this lack of sympathy left a sense of grievance and unrequited affection; for she could not recognize clearly such evidences of love as came from a nature whose intellectual development she disapproved.

To Sabrina, on the other hand, this hindrance to true intimacy remained ever a cause of self-accusation and remorse; and she longed for some opportunity to show signally the love which lay rather as a shadow than as a brightness across her life.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### WHICH MARKS TIME

DURING the next three days, while posts came and went, Sabrina's return to the farm remained unexplained to the outside world. Then the Warrington doctor's gig appeared upon the scene, and it became known that Mrs. Warham had taken to her bed, and that her daughter, who had come only for a passing visit, was staying to nurse, too seriously needed for any day of departure to be named.

Thus from the wreck of all immediate hopes of a reconciliation, appearances at least were saved. Mrs. Warham had felt bitterly the necessity of writing at the last to veto her son-in-law's coming; Sabrina's fixed resolve left her without choice, and the widow, whom his open avowal of wrong done in the past had won over into passionate adherence to his cause, was forced to warn him solemnly against any such rash adventure into his wife's presence as his natural instinct and old easy belief in himself would have prompted.

But that belief had been rudely shaken. For the first time he had discovered something monstrous and unexpected in the woman he loved; and from that moment which had so terribly revealed Sabrina's power to fight against her own instincts and interests, Reddie feared his wife. He had come suddenly into shock with an incalculable force—a woman whose springs of action seemed to lie in the reversal of all that weakness which makes the sex strong in its dealings with men. He had not



believed such a thing to be possible, co-existent with beauty and feminine charm; and the fact that all his desire was still toward this beautiful enigma whose strangeness confounded him, added to his sense of defeat. To some extent it destroyed his nerve, and upset his judgment. Never before had he believed that absence from the woman he wished to win might be advisable, and silence a better advocate than speech; for Reddie was a profound believer in the appeal to the senses, and in the persuasion that voice and warmth of contact have for most women. He knew, also, that Sabrina was not personally indifferent to him, for, though reserved in the display of her emotion, the quiet warmth, the good will that had characterized her bearing toward him since their marriage, had afforded a more subtle flattery to his mind than mere passion, which many past experiences had left somewhat at a discount. And now a few hours had apparently sufficed to sweep all that away. Yet it was not contention or revilings or hard looks that had raised in him for one moment a fundamental doubt of their ultimate accord: all women were jealously made, and their jealousy did but differ in extent and degree. But in the ghastly transformation of his hopes, when a soft cry out of the darkness, greeting him with words of love, had caught his heart from delight to a monstrous deformity of fear, in that passage from mockery of his blind senses and stunned brain to realization of what had actually befallen him, he had learned to fear his wife as man fears the unknown.

Valentine Reddie was a dramatic character; drama to him stood for more than moral argument, and no blow more crushing could have fallen upon him or more lowered him in his own eyes than that which he experienced when in the glare of his own footlights he found whither he had been led.

To put it bluntly, his wife had caused him to pass an abominably uncomfortable night, a feat

which no other woman had ever accomplished ; and yet, for all that, Sabrina had failed of her purpose. In the light of the dreadful dawn that followed, telling certainly of his wife's desertion of him, Lottie appeared still to be nothing but an unfortunate excrescence of the past, an incumbrance unjustly thrust back on him for the disposal of which all due provision had been made. Nor did he understand why, with self-upbraidings and a tender passion of regret, the fond girl had wept, owning herself lost indeed, when at last she knew how and between what persons her coming had caused division. Passive before, she became now eagerly submissive to his will. With all speed he got her back into Wedport, and there for the time they parted.

In the days that followed he had urgent matters to see to : he was still held by his bond, and the time before his departure was short ; a brief exchange of letters with Mrs. Warham convinced him not merely that he must go alone, but must even deny himself the tender pain of a last interview with his wife. Well, jealousy, even such strong unyielding jealousy, — were it only that, — he could forgive, could even prize ; and in thinking thus he did not do his wife an entire injustice. Sabrina's jealousy he conceived to be more subtle, perhaps more generous, than that of other women ; but as jealousy, though fanatical in form, he still chose to regard it ; and upon that he laid his plans. These would take a certain time to mature, but since six months must necessarily be wasted by him in absence, they might be well employed by others at home. He had no fear of finding his material too stubborn ; one half of it had ever yielded easily to his will, and with the other he had already an acquaintance which might serve him well, now that a former vague notion of benevolence had become a definite scheme.

During the week that he remained in the neighbourhood, he respected Mrs. Warham's earnest entreaty

to live in all possible seclusion—seldom going further to seek fellowship of his kind than to the new coastguard station. In the evenings, when off duty, Dan Curtis would come over and help to pack the specimens which he now intended to remove, and Dan was not the sort of fellow to make gossip or even to carry bare news.

At the end of the week Valentine locked up the dismantled museum, paid one last visit to Wedport, and went up to Town the same day. A fortnight later Mrs. Warham looked up from the perusal of a letter which Sabrina had brought to her bedside, giving without comment the news which it contained.

“Your husband sailed yesterday,” she said; “he sends you his remembrance and love.”

So he was gone. Sabrina had herself received more than one letter from him since their parting, but, holding of no account words of protestation which left unaltered the real point of difference between them, had returned no answer.

Meanwhile her anxiety for news of Lottie was becoming keen. She felt responsible; and though assured that in any real extremity the other would have written to her, she could not quiet her conscience with the mere absence of tidings. She knew enough of the girl's timid nature, blended of frailty and devotion, to understand that, short of an emergency, Lottie would be slow to make any advance; the pathos of that character lay in its humble lack of initiative. At their last meeting, though she had come in literal obedience of Sabrina's summons, she had stood at the door trembling, fearing a rebuff, and ready without complaint to return, weary as she was, with her burden into the night. And it was of such women, thought Sabrina, with the memory of that suppliant figure constantly recurring to her mind—it was of poor souls like this that men on their way through life took so little account, that it was a wonder if other

women ever heard of them ! And if some did come to know — as she had done by chance — to what end, she wondered, did they use their knowledge ? Well might she wonder, being in doubt what her own intention and end were to be.

Her mental solitude was great ; there was no one she could openly confide in. A letter from Lady Berrers had come lately from abroad, filled with kind impatience for news of the young wife's happiness ; and she had answered, giving word of her mother's illness, excusing thus the omission of other matters about which she could not well write. Lady Berrers would not be back for some months ; meantime, with Lottie on her mind, what course was open for Sabrina to take ? Circumstances rendered it difficult, perhaps unwise, that she should make any inquiry in person ; there was only one whom she could safely trust — her cousin David. The mere thought of consulting him on a matter so closely connected with the disaster of her marriage brought burning colour to her face ; but she was above any personal considerations of her own comfort now. Coming upon him one afternoon at chaff-cutting, she nerved herself to speak —

"David," she began, "you remember Lottie Gage, do you not ?"

The chopping stopped. "Ay," he said, drawing himself straight.

"Lately," Sabrina went on, "she has returned to the neighbourhood. I saw her, and spoke to her when I first came. Now I do not know what has become of her. Will you find out for me ? She goes by the name of Mrs. Reed. It is possible that she is in Wedport."

"Yes," said David, "she is in Wedport, I know."

His eyes were directed studiously away from her.

Sabrina, trying painfully to speak in natural tones, said —

"You have seen her, then ? Tell me how was she looking — well ?"

"Oh, she seemed bright enough."

"You spoke to her, then?"

"Well, no, I did not."

"You passed an old acquaintance by?—surely that was not kind. And how, if you did not speak to her, can you say that she was 'bright'?"

"Some one was with her," David explained. "A young man," he added.

His companion glanced at him quickly, but his face gave no hidden meaning to his words. She felt vaguely uncomfortable; somehow a young man did not seem the right sort of companion for Lottie under present circumstances; it was not as if she were among her own people. Sabrina knew absolutely nothing of the terms on which she and Valentine had parted; he might have treated her unkindly, have told her something different from the truth: perhaps that was why she had neither written nor come? If Lottie had been taught to think herself cast-off and despised, she ought not to be left all alone; a weak nature like hers was too easily cast down; and Wedport, a garrison town, was not a good place for her.

"I hope," said Sabrina, with some anxiety, "that her companion was not of the soldier class?"

"No, quite the other way," said David.

Sabrina was not satisfied. She hesitated for a moment, then said—

"David, I wish you would find out for me where she is."

"Yes," he said, "of course I'll do it if you wish."

His voice showed reserve, as if the errand was not altogether to his taste.

"And, David, whatever you find out about her, you are not to think hardly of her; she is much to be pitied. I have the address where she stayed for one night, but she may not be there now. Do you mind doing this for me?"

"Oh no!" he said, looking up; "not if you are quite sure you want it done."

"I am quite sure."

She hung her head down in thought, and moved away. It was clear to her that her cousin knew more than he said. Her need of a counsellor was great, and in spite of conventional reasons for reserve on such a matter, she was sorely drawn to seek the help of a man she could certainly trust.

David had resumed his chaff-cutting, and the noise of the knives prevented his hearing her approach till she stood once more at his side.

"Oh, David," she said, "I am in such trouble."

Again he straightened himself from work, but this time did not answer.

"I think you must have known—must have guessed—since—since that morning?"

He jerked his head in assent, and waited to hear more.

"As you know so much, you can, perhaps, guess the rest without my telling it."

Again he nodded. She did not take his silence as a rebuff; while sparing her, it told that he understood. Wasting no time on explanations, she went straight to her difficulty.

"Tell me, David," she said, "what ought I to do?"

"What is it you want to do?" he asked.

"Only what is right."

"Granted; but that's no good, if you haven't a mark to aim for; it's just shooting in the air."

"Wrong has been done," she said feebly.

"Will any doing of yours mend matters?"

"I can but try; the happiness of others shall not be sacrificed for mine."

"You want to make others happy, then?"

"If I only knew how!"

"Well," said David, deliberately, "don't you see that in some cases it's not humanly possible?"

"Why is it not?"

"One can't make happiness where it's not due."

"Why do you say 'not due'?"

"Not where wrong's been done knowingly. You may stop worse coming of it; but happiness, that's another thing altogether."

"But she—you know it is Lottie I mean—she was happy once, until——"

"Maybe she thought so; could it have lasted—that?"

Sabrina hesitated to affirm it; but David would have no doubt on the matter.

"See, Sabra," he said, "you can't, for all you're so sorry for her, say she was not to blame."

"No, but so little, so pardonably; by comparison with others, hardly at all; she—a young and ignorant girl—what could she know of the world's heartless ways?"

"Don't deceive yourself," he said. "In her own light way she was heartless enough, too. I don't say that aunt of hers wasn't a trying sort, but a poor sick bed-ridden thing she was. The girl had that before her eyes to tell her she was doing wrong, if there was nothing else to. We always do have something like that to tell us before we go far from what's right."

"Yes," assented Sabrina; "but we only seem to know of it afterwards. Things only become clear as we look back." Her voice trembled. "David," she said, "are you always so stern a judge of life?"

"I can't deny blame where I see it," he answered.

"But, supposing, David," she urged, "supposing I *knew*—it was almost like that—does her wrongdoing give me now a better claim?"

He turned and looked at her, slow to speak. "Neither you nor her," he replied at last in measured tone. There was something strange in his voice as he said that.

Compassionate in defence of another's weakness, Sabrina did not realize the weight her words carried; admission of vague knowledge concerning a shady past became to his ear a confession that the wrong had been consciously ignored.

David said briefly, "I will go over to Wedport to-night," and again set hand to his machine.

She thanked him with a forlorn heart, feeling but little comforted by his neutral proffer of aid. As she turned away, the harsh throb of the chaff-cutter began again; she heard it long after she had returned to the house.

David Lorry, before he had finished, had cut more chaff than was wanted at the farm for that day or for the day after.



## CHAPTER XXXV

### SABRINA FINDS HERSELF USEFUL

WITHIN a few days Sabrina received a short missive from Lottie. There was no need, she wrote, for any one to be anxious about her; she was well and among friends. David's report bore out the statement; he had found her comfortably lodged with respectable people, employed at dressmaking. But her letter showed an evident avoidance of details. A brief note following the signature alone bore a trace of the writer's personal feelings; it ran thus: "I shall never forget what you have done for me, dear friend. He was very kind to me."

The person thus vaguely indicated might have been David, to whom, as Sabrina's messenger, the letter had already referred. The omission of the name was in keeping with the writer's general reticence: no surname was added to the signature, nor was any response made to Sabrina's expressed wish for a further meeting.

That kind-wisher was obliged to content herself with the knowledge that Lottie's condition was not one of hardship, that care had been taken and provision made for her comfort. It was difficult for Sabrina to say what more she expected when her hot instinct of revolt came to the test of practical experience. Was not the worldly solution, after all, the best; was not Time the great natural physician for the ills and follies of the human race? The glow, the contentment and pride, of her married life were now over; yet was there in Reddie's past

relations with this other woman any true obstacle to honourable reunion? It seemed as though no active wrong were now involved which anything she might do could mend: her cousin's practical counsel, that she should look merely to results and leave personal feelings out of account, drew a dividing line between pride and those purer emotions which had made common alliance. What she had called humiliation might, after all, be true humility, and the worthiest course to pursue.

Thus, in the weary, uneventful days that followed, she questioned with a divided mind, and judgment miserably suspended. In all that unquiet tangle of defeated aims she could see no signal pointing to any justifying end. She would not again consult her cousin; his advice had laid a new weight on her conscience, giving her a direct problem to ponder, if not one that she could solve; and by his manner, as she read it, he seemed now to be holding her aloof. She felt very much alone.

November's brown fell into the grey of winter, and Mrs. Warham did not rise from the bed on which she had lain down. Sabrina's days were spent in almost entire confinement to the house, and attendance in the sick-room. Betty was jealous; and for the first time had some cause. Mrs. Warham was beginning to show a preference, new in their relations, not merely for her daughter's company, but for her ministrations in certain directions where until now Betty had held undisturbed right.

It came as a surprise. Rising one evening at the usual hour to summon Betty to her accustomed reading of prayers, Sabrina was bidden to stay, and herself undertake the office. With murmured directions, her mother guided her through the unfamiliar routine, thanking her, when all was done, with gentle gratitude; and there was a fervour in the sick woman's manner that night as she received and returned her daughter's parting embrace.

Sabrina pondered the matter; and as the request was renewed day after day till compliance became a habit, the meaning of it grew clear. It was the symbol of an unspoken contest between them, of prayer opposed to the mere human will, of spirit seeking to prevail over mind.

That bedside, with its strange mask of peace, where she had to stand mentally armed, was not the only one to which a sense of duty now drew her. As she began to feel once more the permanence of her surroundings, the old unquiet sense of family obligation returned. Yet it was not without an effort of will that she found her way back, after so long an absence, into the presence of her enemy.

Farmer Lorry, though bed-ridden as ever, unable to rise or walk, had recovered in part the use of his most formidable member; and for its exercise he now and again required company. His memory was defective; of events that had happened since his seizure he retained only a passing recollection, but his tongue, though thick and clogged in utterance, had lost little of its force. He greeted his niece with all the old hostility.

"Ah, so ye've come back, have ye! I might have knowed there'd be no getting rid of you. What are ye doing here now, eh?"

Sabrina gave her mother's illness as the cause of her return.

"Oh, ill is she?" he growled, sourly incredulous. "Who put that notion into her head?"

The information did not stay long on his mind: Sabrina's presence was the one disturbing fact.

"What are ye here for?" he asked again. "Why can't ye get married? There's fools enough in the world!"

Strange irony it was that the old man's gibing tongue should force admission of the very thing she wished to deny. She confessed matrimony to be her present state.

"Hey! what?" queried Lorry, contradictory to the last. "Tales like that don't fool me!"

Why, then, should she trouble to reiterate the unwelcome fact? This was part of her penance: she went through with it, and was not heard.

"No," he said, "no; nor ye'll not have David, either — not while I'm alive."

Bent on keeping the peace, she set herself to talk him down, telling him all that she knew of the crops, and of what was going on about the farm. When she gave him an opportunity for further speech, he said —

"So it's the farm ye've come back for, is it?" Plainly David was still in his mind.

"What's the four-acre field got in it?" he asked presently.

She named the crop. Then he bade her number him the hay-ricks and the corn-stacks, how many wood-loads there were, log and billet; he required of her the names of the cart-horses, and the sheep-dogs, then of all the farm-labourers: what wage were they getting? Sabrina did not know.

"Ah!" he paused reflectively, and went back to the point from which he had started. "Now, Zabby, you tell me over again: what's the four-acre field got in it?"

The old man had discovered a use for her; other people had not her knack of summary description. By means of her he reviewed the land that no longer owned his sway; saw it briefly and vividly before him, and forgot it again. Standing at the window, Sabrina told him what was going on outside. In the big barn they were winnowing. She named the man at the winch, the one whose task it was to keep the machine fed, whose to draw off the sacks of winnowed grain from below. Yes, he could see it all.

While she spoke, David, with his dogs, crossed the fore-court. He looked up and smiled, touching his cap; but of that she gave no word: there were

safer matters of interest for the old farmer's ears than the mention of his son.

When he tired of her, she was abruptly dismissed; nor did his manner allow her to think that she had won any way in his favour. But she had found a use; though much of what she told him passed from his enfeebled mind, some remained.

"David, man," he inquired, when his son came up to bed that night, for father and son lay now in the same room, "what's the four-acre field got in it?"

"Wurzels," he was informed.

"Wurzels it is," replied the farmer. "I could 'a' told you that, David."

Ten minutes later, in the pitch-darkness that hung waiting on slumber, the old man's voice was heard again —

"Davy, Davy, lad, when I'm gone ye'll not let Zabby have aught to do with the farm, will ye? You'll promise me that!"

"You go to sleep, father," said a stern voice from the neighbouring bed.

"And, David?"

"Well?"

"If ever she gets a fool to marry her, don't you be the one."

There was no reply.

"Do 'ee hear what I say, David?"

Before any answer came to that question old Farmer Lorry was asleep.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE ETERNAL FEMININE

WARRINGFORD within its earthen walls has always boasted a sound slumber. Like some hibernating animal, it appears to live by its own heat, and to subsist without labour. Hours can be reckoned even on market-day when you may pass from one end of the town to the other, and not meet with a soul. All the extra movement of trade then takes place in the yard behind the Blue Bear, where farmers and their carts congregate to exchange burdens of poultry, pigs, grain, and dairy-produce.

During one of these quiet hours when the streets were without traffic, Sabrina, who had driven over alone, left the pony-trap at the inn, and set out upon a round of shoppings. Before long she had more in hand than she could comfortably carry alone. Calling at a shop in the far end of the town for an article which had been promised by a certain hour, and finding the order not yet executed, she laid down her packages and went out, hoping to find some man or boy to be her porter as far as the inn.

The street showed its accustomed vacuity, but from behind the ramparts she fancied that she could hear the sound of children at play. Mounting to the higher level, she found herself looking down on a scene she remembered. Below lay the old gabled house, more mildewed and ivy-grown than ever; overshadowed by the north wall it seemed, with the closing-in of the year, cut off from all chances

of sun. Picturesque as it still was, the thought of living in such a place sent a chill to her blood.

A small urchin carrying a babe stood immediately in her path; no other children were to be seen.

"I want some one to carry parcels for me," she said. "Can your mother spare you for a few minutes, do you think?"

The child's answer brought recognition; she heard again the remembered wail of complaint.

"Oh no!"

His head swung dolefully with a weight of unuttered negatives.

"Let us just go and see," proposed Sabrina. "Is your mother at home?"

"Oh no!—yes, maybe she is now: I don't know."

It seemed that he could not even make affirmation without clothing it in denial. Together they stepped down the bank.

"This is your newest baby-brother, I suppose?" said Sabrina, to rouse speech from her sad guide.

"Oh no!" wailed the urchin.

"Sister, then?" Again came the inevitable answer. It was sheer fatuity for Sabrina then to add, "Not your own at all?" The inquiry drew no syllable of change.

They had now arrived at back premises, whose open door revealed discomfort within. A young woman with the worn face of pauseless maternity came to the threshold in answer to the boy's cry of "mother." She bore a child at her breast; two others with pale grubby faces clung to her skirts, eyeing the stranger silently.

Sabrina stated her errand, only to withdraw it with apology.

"I see he is much too useful to you. I must find some one else."

"Oh no!" said the woman, "he can go. Here, Dicky, give him to me!"

In spite of Sabrina's remonstrance, the transfer was effected.

"But," she protested, "surely you are not strong enough. Why should you do this for me?"

"Well, ma'am," said the woman, "it's better the boy should earn something. He'll have to begin soon."

"He?" Sabrina looked at the small wan urchin beside her. "Surely not yet! How old is he?"

"He's over ten, ma'am."

Sabrina would have guessed seven. With a growing pity she regarded the two younger ones; they two showed signs of an impoverished blood. The other two infants seemed in better condition; ill-health had not there had so much time to show.

"And one of these is not yours?" she said in wonder.

"No, ma'am. How did you know that?"

"Your little boy told me only just now."

"Yes, that's true; I'm only nursing it."

"You? Then has it already lost its own mother?"

Such fostering seemed indeed a piteous beginning of life.

"Oh no, ma'am," replied the woman. "The mother's still alive; she pays me so much a week to keep him. You see, he's only a love-child."

"A love-child?" inquired Sabrina; the phrase puzzled her. Then, as she understood, her face grew fiery with another woman's shame.

"I beg pardon, ma'am; I thought you were a married woman," said the other, seeing her change of look.

"So I am," murmured the girl, "but some things are quite new to me!" She drew nearer as she spoke, claiming to have in her arms that cast-off waif of humanity. "Where does it come from?" she asked,—"far?"

"The mother lives in Wedport," said the woman; "at least, she used to. I don't quite know where she is now."

"Does she not even come to see it, then?"



"She hasn't been for some time; she sent me a quarter's money in advance not long ago, because she was going to be away. I'm to keep it for good if I get on well with it for the first year. You see, ma'am, it pays me well for my trouble; it's harder to get 'em placed before they're off the breast."

"Oh, how wicked some people can be!" cried Sabrina. "Does its mother not care for it?"

"Yes, I thinks she does care rather much," said the woman. "When she was last here, she was crying her eyes out over it, saying it shouldn't be anybody else's but hers, and all sorts of fondness that, of course, didn't mean anything. Why, she'd come to say good-bye to it then. Yes, it's a sad pity. I've never seen any one nicer-looking than she was; and quite young too."

At what point of the narrative suspicion arose in Sabrina's mind it were hard to say. But now all at once she broke in.

"Wedport: you said Wedport! Tell me — what was this woman like? Her name? I must know! Tell it me!"

Startled by such sudden vehemence, but holding her ground, the other said —

"I'm not sure I ought to tell you that, ma'am."

Sabrina swept scruples aside. "Was it Reed?" she demanded.

"I think it was something like that," said the woman, salving her conscience with an air of doubt.

"It was!" Sabrina cried. "I can see it was! Ah! now, *now* I know!" Her voice grew strained with sorrow and anger; like one distracted she turned on the woman, crying, "This child belongs to me; it is mine, mine, I tell you, mine! I let it go. I did not know where it was; but it is mine now! Yes; it shall be, — it must!"

And as she strained the babe passionately to her breast, repeating that cry of covetousness, she looked down, met the calm, unspeculating gaze of its eyes, and became still.

"Oh, Val! Val!" she murmured in desolation of heart. At the sound of that name it seemed as if at last some chord of emotion, unstirred as yet, had been touched and mastered. She bowed her head low and broke into loud weeping. And as she wept, with a new tenderness of compassion springing in her heart, then, and not till then, did Sabrina's married love give up the ghost.

The woman and her three children looked wonderingly on.

"Mother," said the small boy at last, "what's that lady crying for?"

"Hush!" whispered his mother, "how should I know? P'raps it's her conscience. She'll have done soon. You run and wash yourself, Dicky, so as to be ready to carry the parcels. Don't you be long!"

The child disappeared within doors.

"I suppose you didn't expect to find it here?" said the woman at last, in a half-sympathetic, half-curious tone. "Do you mean that the child is really yours, ma'am?"

"Oh yes," said Sabrina, "indeed it is mine; I have a right to it. Do not ask me to explain! You must let me take it away — not to-day, I know that is impossible; but to-morrow or the day after, or the end of the week. Please do not be offended; I will pay whatever you think right. I am sure you would have been kind to it; but, oh, you do see, do you not? It must be mine!"

The woman still watched her with the air of kindly suspicion. Sympathy drew her nearer; she laid her hand humbly and timidly on Sabrina's arm.

"Oh, ma'am," she whispered, "won't you tell me the truth? I'm sure you're hiding something, and I can't let you have him without I know. It wouldn't be right."

Sabrina saw kind eyes close to her own; there was honesty and good intent in that worn face. Impulsively she said —

"Do you not understand? This is my husband's child."

"Ah!" said the woman in a tone of decent commiseration, "so you didn't know of it before?"

"Yes, yes, I did; and once I had it in my arms as I have now, and I let it be taken away from me. I thought others wanted it; but now nobody wants it as I do. That is why I say it is mine."

"Then you haven't none of your own?" inquired the other; and, at Sabrina's forlorn sign, she, that mother of hungry mouths and physical frailties, uttered a woman's word. "Poor thing," she said, "sure and that's a pity now!"

There spoke Nature, the great fanatic, who still makes the miseries of childbirth seem good to the weaker half of the human race.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### LOTTIE EXPLAINS

IN a small room, sparsely furnished and specklessly clean, with pink distempered walls upon which a white crust of mould was beginning to show in patches, sat Lottie, mistress of her own home. The window, looking out over the level of a raised fore-court, gave view to a wide horizon of sea. It was in all respects a repetition of the Hawk's Point model, set down at a more sheltered part of the coast: even some of its inhabitants were the same. Next door dwelt Mrs. Owens.

The curious regulations of the service forbade much intercourse; these near neighbours seldom entered each other's doors. Lottie had not been there long, and already she was beginning to be oppressed by the loneliness of the life. It was midday, but there were no preparations for a meal; all spoke of solitary feminine occupation. A sewing-machine was fixed to the table, needlework lay around, but Lottie's hands were empty; she sat doing nothing in an attitude of expectancy.

Twelve o'clock had been gone more than five minutes when there came a quick step without, and a knock at the door. The girl jumped up and ran to open it with nervous eagerness.

"Ah, I knew it must be you, ma'am," she cried, and stood waiting, looking up in her visitor's face, evidently expecting something.

"No, Lottie! I can't kiss you now," said Sabrina, speaking with cold reserve.

Lottie's face was a picture of surprise and woe. "Not?" she queried, her eyes growing wide with tears.

"I can't understand," went on Sabrina, "why you are here. Is this your home? You said 'the end house.' I thought you must be with Mrs. Owens; but you are here alone."

"Yes," said Lottie, "I didn't want you to know till you came. Oh, ma'am, dear ma'am, don't look at me so unkindly; everything has been made all right for me now — I've been married."

"You have been married!"

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Curtis now. Dan, he was a follower of mine once; and so he was very glad to — to — oh, you understand, ma'am! — when he saw his chance again, he married me."

Sabrina began to realize something of the situation. "And you are living with him here?" she said, after a pause.

"Yes." Lottie's colour rose a little.

"How long is it since you married him?"

"Nearly three weeks, ma'am."

A new thought sent a ray of charity into Sabrina's heart.

"Then it was just while you married that you sent your baby away? When are you going to have him back?"

At once disconsolate grief showed in the girl's looks; her tears flowed.

"I mayn't," she sobbed; "Dan won't have him! Ah, that's the one trouble of it, that's where I has to pay! Oh, ma'am, do you be kind to me, do kiss me just once! I — I did it, almost — for you!"

"What do you mean — you 'did it for me'?" asked Sabrina, appalled, her voice a whisper, her heart ice.

"I mean, when I married, it wasn't all for myself. I did love you for all you'd done; yes, I did! And then, you see, I knew, — I understood. Oh yes, I know all, I know how it was now! And we

couldn't both go on loving him—it wasn't right; and it wasn't possible for him to love me any more when he had you; I could see that well enough. I'm not so silly as I used to be, and I'm not as bad as some people would think me. And then—he said ——”

She stopped, and looking at Sabrina's white face asked—

“Are you still angry with me, dear, kind friend?”

Sabrina had scarcely strength to speak. “No,” she said, “I am not angry: go on! What did he say?”

“He said I had come between you—that it was my fault for coming here. But he was still very kind in everything he done for me; and he promised he'd look after me, and see I was settled. Oh, you won't think he was unkind, will you? So then he put me into good lodgings with nice people; and then—then Dan came, and said he wanted me to be his wife. He knew all about it: I hadn't to tell him anything, it had been all done for me; only he said he couldn't take the child as well. And I couldn't ask him to do that; no, and I didn't, for I knew then that if I was to do any good, I mustn't be thinking too much of what I wanted. And so Dan married me; and though he's hard sometimes he's very kind too, and I know we shall b-b-be happy if—if I c-c-can only not think about it too much!” The plaintive voice rose to accents of half-questioning entreaty; the fair head dropped forward on to the table, and she sobbed aloud.

Sabrina knelt down beside her, and now, without reluctance, took the shaken form within her arms.

“Oh, Lottie,” she cried, “my poor, poor Lottie! What have we all done to you, my dear?”

A muffled voice returned answer. “He was very k-k-kind to me!” it said.

At that word Sabrina could no longer restrain the tender indignation of her grief. Her head sought

fellowship with a companion sorrow, and the two women clung and sobbed convulsively in each other's arms.

"Oh, Lottie!" murmured Sabrina, when long weeping was done, "did you do this for me?"

And "Yes," answered that simple heart, perceiving no danger in letting the truth be owned, "for you, and for him too."

"He told you to do it?"

"I knew well he would be glad; he had told Dan."

"Ah!" Full comprehension sounded then from Sabrina's lips. "Lottie!" she said. The girl moved within her arms, but did not look up.

"Lottie!" said Sabrina, again, "I want you to look at me. Listen!"

A weeping face met hers with sorrowful regard.

"Lottie, will you give your child to me?"

"Give him—to you?" The foolish eyes were full of wonder and inquiry.

"Yes, I mean it—to me, to have for my own. Will you give him to me: it is all I ask?"

"Oh yes, yes!" whispered Lottie, "and then!" she glanced with shy stealth into Sabrina's face.

"Well, what then?" inquired the other, as the girl paused hesitating.

"Then sometimes,—so that he shan't quite forget me—you will let me come and see him? Dan need not know."

And Sabrina, as she accepted the gift, gave the half of it back again.

"Yes, Lottie," she said, "I will let you come."

When they were parting Dan's wife lifted up her face in confidence for the kiss that was not refused, and as Sabrina's lips touched her cheek, inquired simply—

"Why would you not kiss me, ma'am, when you first came?"

"Because," answered Sabrina, smiling sadly, "I thought, then, that you had a will of your own;

and now I have learned my mistake. If ever you have another child, Lottie, be sure that one thing is yours by right: give up your happiness, your reputation, your life, but do not give up that!"

So Sabrina talked of what a woman may and may not be called on to surrender. On her return home her own heart was brought crucially to the test. Her mother greeted her entry with happy expectant looks.

"My dear," she said, "where have you been so long? I have something I want to tell you: news."

Sabrina sat down by the couch. Little as she expected to be cheered by news which the other found good, in response to those encouraging looks she smiled, saying gently—

"Well, mother, what is your news?"

Mrs. Warham took her hand, "I had heard it rumoured," she said, "but I waited to be sure, and now I know from the best source that it is true. My dear, there is no longer any excuse for you to delay doing what is right. You can have no scruples now: even on your own grounds you can be reconciled to your husband with a clear conscience. God has brought everything right at last."

"What do you mean?" asked Sabrina, knowing already too well.

"Lottie Gage was married three weeks ago. Put away all jealousy now, since duty has been made easy for you. When your husband returns let him find comfort again in the wife he loves."

"Ah!" cried Sabrina, "how little you either know or understand, mother! To-day I too heard for the first time what you think such good news. To do this,—to satisfy what he imagines is my jealousy, he has made a woman desert her child, has made her marry a man she does not love. Do you think I shall ever go back to him now? God forbid such baseness even so poor a reward! Ah, mother,



if you love me, say no more! Only be sure I know myself now, and mean what I am saying. If nothing else can, this, at least, will make you understand, since you believe so much in outward signs."

As she spoke she drew off her wedding ring, and held out a bare hand.

"That tells you how little I am his wife, now," she said.

Then, as she looked into that face of patient sorrow and wonder, her voice changed: she flung herself by the bed, weeping.

"Ah, dear heart, how I have hurt you!" she cried. "But it is the truth,—it had to be told! Dear mother, forgive me for being what I am; else how can I forgive myself that I am still alive?"

But there was no spoken forgiveness then.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### LEADING-STRINGS

YOUTH is the period of stubborn knees. Spiritually and physically, while we possess it, we hold out against the instruction which our own frailty, or the dictation of others, seeks to instil. The knee which bends to outside influences has already begun to age, and to learn that the body is no freehold for the spirit.

Age first discovers itself anatomically in a man when, having commenced the sitting-down motion, he finds he must go on with it. His knees "give," as we say: it is the beginning of his surrender of life. So, in the approach to final dissolution, the body comes to a stage, beyond this of mere sedentary collapse, when, having willed to go to bed, it has not the will to rise from it again. Here is a surer sign of what must follow than any definite malady, being so much more incurable; it is, indeed, our own rendering of that deadly illness of the Kanaka, who lies down homesick, and turns his face to the wall to die—a privilege of which no medicine can deprive him.

This was the ailment from which Mrs. Warham now suffered: not having the will to get up from the bed on which she had once lain down, she was merely waiting to die. And yet, though the spark of desire for health had quitted her feeble frame, she still staked her weakness as a strong man his power on the attainment of her end.

To one watching her stretched motionless on

her bed all the long hours of each day, her attitude was like prayer; and so she meant it to be. She was waiting for her daughter to yield to those harboured hopes of reconciliation which alone could bring contentment to her last hour. Sabrina knew it well.

She knew also that her own administrations were accepted in preference to another's, not through any yielding to natural affection, but as part of a set scheme. The dull chamber with its reduced light, the ordered bed enfolding its quiet occupant, the worn face always waiting through the uneventful weeks, all these were the expression of a continual controversy where no word was spoken, a field of battle with forces in array. Often she would retire from that scene to the solitude of her own chamber, finding unendurable the silence that waited on a word she could not utter. Her mother did not now ask to be left much alone, as had formerly been her custom; her instinct not to give trouble had become subordinate to a greater purpose; and thus, without any word demanding her presence, Sabrina was held captive. At certain hours of the day Mrs. Warham would gently dismiss her to fresh air and exercise: even during her worst hours of weakness the punctual utterance of the word never failed. For her daughter's sake she would rouse up from the light slumber in which so many of her hours were passed; and the form of her injunction, "Do go out, my dear, for half an hour at least," implied that no longer absence was looked for.

The days passed in leaden hours. Mrs. Warham cared little to be read to, save when, night and morning, by an innovation which had become custom, Sabrina read prayers by her mother's side. To give more comfort in her performance of that office, she would kneel beside the bed, uttering invocations alien to her own spiritual beliefs, and would read on till the signal of a faintly audible

"Amen" told that for the time her mother's ghostly needs were satisfied.

And through it all Sabrina had now a clear understanding of the intention, and of its almost certain uselessness. No appeal from her, however impassioned, could have induced Mrs. Warham to see the facts differently, or to believe that the separation of their views was too great to admit of such means of conversion coming to good effect. Sabrina was sure that her mind could not change; yet she was not sure always that, in some moment of desperate pity and weakness, she might not give way, and, for the sake of her mother's peace, sacrifice her own.

During those early months of the year, while winter passed into spring, she discovered how tyrannous is the strength that lies in the weakness of those we dare not wound; and once again, as in the days before her marriage, she felt how circumstances conspired to force her into a course opposed both to her instincts and her scruples. But there was a difference. Pride had then been the deciding factor; now, on the contrary, there were times when humility and tender compunction tempted her to yield even more than her own will. Her own chance of happiness was gone; and her self-esteem had been so lowered and wounded that it seemed at times to matter little if, for the sake of peace to others, she agreed to formal terms of reconciliation, and renewed a lifeless bond.

The time was drawing near for her husband's return; and she knew from certain letters which had passed through her hands, and lain unopened in her presence, that he and her mother held communication together. The doubt had become a dread — what each, in the event, intended to do; and when the moment of ordeal came, as it must, what means had she of escape? Hardly any. The small sum of money which she had managed to save during her salaried years of teaching, in

addition to the earnings of her librarianship, had been more than half spent upon her marriage outfit. Enough was left to give her bare subsistence perhaps for a year; but of what use was it? Under present conditions she was bound hand and foot, with no outlook or shelter, or means of retreat from a position where instinct told that her defences were being slowly undermined.

Nevertheless, in a matter where she was still free to move, she had acted with promptness and resolution. A small two-roomed cottage adjoining the farm had fallen vacant through the removal into larger quarters of one of the married farm-labourers. Sabrina applied for it, naming as prospective tenant a young widow living a pensioner among relatives in the neighbourhood.

David Lorry looked grave when he heard of what lay behind: such a course, he told her plainly, might lead to scandal.

"I must risk that," she said.

"Anywhere else but here," he advised.

"No, David; for the present that is impossible," she replied. "I have seen wrong done that I can make right: you have taught me my lesson. Do not ask me to adopt half-measures now."

He said no more then, but she could see that he still disapproved; and although he placed no further obstacle in her way, even lending practical aid in the getting of things ready, she was vexed with him for not giving her a warmer countenance, being herself in a fever of eagerness, almost of agitation, to see her plan carried into effect. An undefined idea was spurring her on to action; the adoption of this child, abandoned by its natural guardians, might in some way give her a stronger defence against any renewal of her husband's claim. Here, at least, she could point to one duty voluntarily undertaken, which he no less voluntarily had relinquished, as evidence of the fundamental difference which now lay between them.

So deeply had the essential opposition of their minds become impressed upon her through a series of confronting facts, that Valentine's possible approval of her action and acceptance of its consequences did not occur to Sabrina when, armed with Lottie's consent, she brought the child to its new home. She did not realize that this act of adoption might draw her into the very entanglement she sought to avoid; that through it a way opened, if not back to her heart, yet to her resigned acceptance of her husband's partnership in the task which once ignored was still his inalienable right.

Breaking the news to her mother on the evening of the day that saw child and nurse installed under the neighbouring roof—

"I wonder, mother," she said, "if it will be any satisfaction to you to know that I have adopted Lottie Gage's child as my own. It seemed, under the circumstances, the only right thing to be done."

Mrs. Warham lay for a long time silent. "Does your husband know this?" she said at last.

"I have not told him," Sabrina answered; "but it is no secret. The child is here."

The dying woman looked slightly shocked, but the world had at last somewhat weakened its hold on her imagination: spiritual truths stood nearer now. She spoke in a patient and grieved tone; and there was some discernment in her word then.

"I could be glad," she said, "could I think you had done it out of love, and not out of pride."

It was an accusation which Sabrina could not answer.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### ILICET

OUTSIDE that quiet chamber the glad cry of life, freed for its first airing and stretch of limb after the constraints of winter, began to be heard once more. Now and again, from the open plot below, a child's cry would carry to Sabrina's ears; and her heart would leap in response, causing a wonder even to herself, so that at times she must steal to the window and look out and see, and return to her watch refreshed. Three weeks of short jealous glimpses and stolen interviews had done their work. When her mother's words recurred to her she could afford to smile now: "It is for love," she told herself. But it was love rigidly limited to the object of its choice. She was fearful every day lest Lottie should claim the fulfilment of her promise, and come to awaken memories that were now being merged in the ministrations of her own touch and voice; for in this new care Sabrina had at last discovered that she could be a jealous woman unwilling to admit others to an equal claim. Nor was she ashamed to own it. "Soon," she thought, "he will be all that I possess in the whole world." And her heart swelled with triumph at the sense of how great that possession would be: her outlook on life was no longer the impoverished thing it had been. It was a joy she had no one to share: Mrs. Warham was silent whenever the subject was mentioned, still regarding the act as an outcome of pride and insurrection against duty. Even David,

though always kind and thoughtful on her behalf, seemed to make that tiny life be a barrier between them.

One day he had come on them together, and looking had turned away without speech. She thought it the unkindest thing he had ever done, and, blind to his trouble, supposed that he too cared what tongues might say.

A dark week dawned: Sabrina's new source of comfort had to be resigned at the call of a more imminent need. Mrs. Warham's state had become rapidly worse. It was evident at last that the waiting will had worn itself out, and that the shadow which now came and rested, and moved not again from the quiet and resigned face, was the penumbra of death.

Peace reigned strangely during the days that followed that change. Betty ceased from jealousy and scolding; she came humbly entreating to be allowed once more an equal share in attendance on the mistress she had so long and faithfully served; and since Sabrina would not give up her own post save when necessity compelled, the two often shared watch for long hours together. On the morning of the third day Mrs. Warham, at her own request, received the consolations of the Church; the rites for the dying were performed. To Sabrina, looking on with pitying heart and only partly understanding them, they had a sort of impressive ugliness wherein the coming dissolution of spirit from matter stood crudely symbolized. She was glad when the priest was gone.

The ceremony ended, she still knelt by her mother's side; and the hand that now, disengaged from prayer, crept into her own, seemed scarcely to belong any more to earth. She bent down her lips and kissed it, and being answered by a faint pressure, was seized with a sudden dread lest now kind silence was to be broken and the peace of present relations disturbed.



Betty had gone out of the room with the departing priest: several minutes passed, and she did not return. Presently there came a faint knock at the door. It was Betty's custom thus to knock softly and then enter without further summons: now the knock was repeated.

"Yes, come in!" called Sabrina. She heard the door open behind her; but it was only the sudden radiance upon her mother's face which had caused her to look round.

In the doorway stood Valentine; and as she recognized him she realized that at last the moment which she had dimly foreseen and striven to avert was come. This, she knew, was no unbidden or unexpected intrusion on his part. How well and surely at last had her gentle and peace-loving antagonist found the means to her purpose! The weak hand which Sabrina held in hers was become the symbol of a power against which she had no weapons of defence. With quick foresight she realized at once the situation, the purpose, and her own impotence; and realizing it all, hopeless of escape, felt the entanglement, not like some poor creature brought to bay, but like a culprit summoned to the acknowledgment of guilt. For in the submission that now seemed inevitable lay, in a sense, the confession of wrong-doing. Why, if she were right, should she be unable to plead now? Why have to yield if pure justice were indeed the cause for which she had fought?

In the doorway Valentine Reddie had paused with a look half anxious, half tender, uncertain whether to advance. No one spoke to give him welcome. Sabrina did not rise; her mother's right hand lay in hers, too frail and dependent to be let go. And now the gentle clasp of those fingers tightened as if to say, "At last, at last I have my will!"

The other hand lying out upon the bed rubbed feebly at the coverlet; faintly impatient it plucked

and let go. It was a signal for Valentine to approach.

Without a word he crossed the room, stopped at the left hand side of the bed and knelt down.

"You have come," whispered the dying woman, receiving the hand extended towards her; her fingers closed and rested in unmistakable welcome upon his.

"Yes, yes, I am come!" said Valentine. "The moment your message reached me; I did not delay."

Across the narrow space which separated them he turned his gaze upon his wife, waiting till she also should speak. But from the face of the woman he loved estranged eyes looked back at him, eyes which refused him a greeting. Yet there was less pride in them than fear: before his eyes that burned and grew tender Sabrina's looks fell. Dispirited, her glance stole back to her mother's face; and at the sight of it all other considerations fled.

With a faint murmur of happiness Mrs. Warham closed her eyes; an air of deeper resignation, of more assured peace—to her daughter it seemed almost of triumph—began now to impress the worn features. In the patient attitude of recumbrance under the evenly disposed coverlet there was the same sense of order and self-discipline which had marked her life and coloured all her surroundings. The methodical neatness of the sick-chamber seemed an emanation from the spirit of its central occupant, even as the carefully constructed twilight of white curtains and blinds gave something of the wilful obscurantism which had become the habit of her mind.

And along with all this, the recurring silences of the hour which followed were as truly a part of her character impressing itself on others as were the very few words she then spoke. Only at rare intervals did the words come.

Minute had followed minute before she again roused herself to speech.

"I wished you to come," she said; and the sound of her slow laboured inspiration as she gathered effort for the words was scarcely more audible than the hushed breathing of the two watchers at her side.

Again there was silence:—closed eyes, clasped hands, no motion, though the event was drawing near.

A few minutes passed; again the dying woman spoke. "I—thank—God—" Like disjointed drops of water, where continuous overflow has ceased, word followed word.—"Spared—you come—see—prayer—answered."

Once more between them flowed a silence stronger than any words. The dying soul uttered its will without speech, while again the body sought strength. This was her hour, and her bequest, hers not only to possess but to bestow: for this she had laboured, for this prayed: waiting, believing, not doubting but that it would come. Now she had it; it was her very own. They also were hers now: she drew them with her toward the threshold of death.

Across that wasting tissue of a worn-out life, the two who had once been friends, lovers, companions, again exchanged looks. And yet it was no true exchange that took place then: for the look of one gave no response to the other's asking. Peace was not yet made: if there was to be peace between them at all its chances hung on the thread of this dying woman's breath.

So long the silence endured little hope seemed to remain: minute after minute went by of a time that seemed endless. Half an hour went by. Lying motionless, holding the two hands in hers, Mrs. Warham spoke again; this time it was to closer effect.

"Sabrina—this is—your—" The word "husband" came after a pause.

There was no answer.

The hand that held Valentine's began to move, traversing the bed from left to right. Advancing a few inches, too feeble to attain its end, it stopped to rest.

Sabrina watched the movement with a cold fascination; she waited for a corresponding movement to follow. It came. The hand she cherished communicated its will to hers in a faint pressure of the fingers. Without resistance she let herself be led.

A few inches only: again there was a pause. Was it cruelty now not to anticipate the wish? She did not know: she submitted at least to obey. Once more hand drew toward hand.

Valentine Reddie watching upon his side now saw that the hand which slowly approached his own bore no ring: the symbol of their union was gone from it. In his own lay a shadow of flesh and blood, on the third finger of which a ring hung loose. Mrs. Warham's gaze was upon him, full of some meaning it wished to convey; she drew her hand feebly through his and uttered a long sigh. The thin hoop of gold, as the soul resigned the last of its earthly possessions, slipped down and lay upon his palm.

Then for the first time Sabrina spoke. "No, no!" she cried, understanding to the full the self-renunciation of that act. "No, no!" She caught away her hand and reached over impetuously to stay what was about to be done. Before she could prevent her hand was met and clasped: then all three became joined.

"Ah, dear mother, do not, do not!" she cried in tender heart-wrung protest. "Not for me, I do not deserve it! Oh, you must not—your own ring!" But all her words, even as she spoke, she knew would be of no avail. There was a light in the dying face.

"Yes, yes, my dear," came the ghost of the

known voice, "for then — then — you will understand."

Sabrina fought no more: she yielded her hand to the will of others, but could no longer hold up her head. Shame and tenderness had broken all the forces of her resistance and bowed her low; humbly she laid her face against her mother's side, and in the warmth and life still perceptible there strove to find comfort for the desolation of her soul.

"My dear, my dear, my dear!" came now in a murmur too faint to be called a voice. She felt upon her finger once more the pressure of the marriage-bond: she heard Valentine's voice deep and low saying "Sabra," and knew that below the controlling touch of a mortal perishing hand, feeble beyond words, the pulse of youth beating strong and warm upon her own was his.

She prayed only for silence to be her refuge now; but her ordeal was not yet done.

"Say!" came the low whisper of the dying woman's voice, "say!"

Sabrina could not endure to hear more: the meaning she understood.

"Oh!" she cried in tones between entreaty and command, "dear, dear heart, do be at rest! Why should you think about me any more? Surely I have troubled you enough. Nothing I could do or say now could ever make the amends I wished."

"Say — say," entreated the dying voice.

"Dearest, I do say — you have done all, all that you could! Be content now: what you have done, is done! I bless you, I thank you with all my heart for your dear love and care for me! Oh, you dear mother, who could have the heart to hurt you now?"

Sabrina's passionate words and broken utterance seemed at last to have given satisfaction to that anxious mind. Mrs. Warham closed her eyes and withdrew her thoughts to the inner consolations of

religion from a world in which her last account had now been rendered.

For several minutes no change of movement took place; but a gradual alteration in the features told clearly that the time of final dissolution had arrived. The breath grew more feeble; no struggle to retain hold on life was any longer apparent. Under the dying hands lay those of the husband and wife brought together again by this last act. Sabrina's eyes were upon her mother's face; Valentine's upon hers. Neither of them stirred or spoke.

Presently the wearing-down process stopped. A momentary look, as though of thought that had missed its aim, crossed those mild features; life seemed to pause for some reminder that did not come. Then slowly beneath the sheet the feeble knees were drawn up in the bed and relaxed again. A breath went, not to return.

A minute elapsed: neither of the watchers moved: two minutes and they knew that they knelt in each other's company alone. The hands that lay over theirs were already chill; and the chilling process went on.

Gently Sabrina drew her hand away out of her husband's clasp. In a whisper, recovering from the long tension her mind had borne, she delivered herself from the ghostly spell which the dead had sought to lay on her soul.

"Now go!" she said briefly. Breath came to her again: she rose to her feet.

Valentine rose also: they stood facing each other: only the narrow bed and the quiet body divided them. He read and threw off the meaning of her words.

"I will *not!*" he cried, sprang round to where she stood, and clasped her in his arms.

From head to foot he held her: she was his own once more.

"My wife, my Sabra!" he cried, kissing the lips that denied him their welcome.

Faintly, with a half-weary gesture, she turned her head from him. She did not trouble to repulse him, nor did she shrink from the tender ardour of his embrace. She remained simply cold, passive, waiting to be released.

He could not hold her for ever, — this form from which all the instincts of wife and woman seemed flown. She was dead to him; and in that moment, though he denied it still, he knew it.

It was his final defeat; no possible recovery of love waited for him there: the matter thenceforth concerned only his pride.

So at last he let her go. Again she said, this time less in a tone of command than of request, "Will you go now?"

For a moment he looked at her in silence; then he bowed his head, and without another word left the room.

## CHAPTER XL

### LAST OFFICES

THROUGH what process of thought or prayer Sabrina's solitary communing with the dead brought comfort to her perturbed spirit may not be known. Five hours had passed, and the evening was already well advanced, when the door of the death-chamber opened, and Sabrina appeared upon the threshold.

Her face was then very pale but calm, bearing upon it the marks of a well-weighed and settled grief, from which all traces of earlier and more violent emotion had disappeared. This, too, is of note as indicating her mind; the act of restitution had already been performed, her hand bore no ring. She found Betty waiting without, as though upon the point of seeking admittance.

"Oh, ma'am! I thought you were never coming!" cried that faithful soul, bursting into tears of relief after long suspense, and reaching out motherly arms.

Sabrina submitted to be embraced.

"You didn't sound alive; no, never once!" was the poor woman's complaint, telling where waiting hours had been spent.

"Betty," said her young mistress, to make demonstration brief, "will you go and tell Mr. David I want to see him?"

"He's there now, waiting below," said Betty, and went off to do her bidding.

A few minutes later David appeared. Sabrina was in a mood which belongs to grief in its more



resolute forms; she shrank from kind words, even from marks of sympathy. It was a relief to her mind that there were practical things waiting to be done. She said first—

“Have you seen Mr. Reddie?”

“Yes.”

“Has he gone?”

“Yes. He was obliged to; but he left word he would be back in two days at the latest—in time for the funeral.”

“Ah! he said that?” Sabrina meditated. “Yes, he is quite right. I know she would have wished it.”

She remembered then her first object in sending for him, and giving general directions as to what she wished done—

“Will you see to this for me?” she said.

David hesitated a moment. “It’s all been done,” he answered.

“Who has done it?”

“Mr. Reddie said you were not to be troubled; he would see to everything, Warringford being in his way.”

“Very well,” answered Sabrina, resignedly; “then I have nothing else to do.”

After a few more words she and David parted. Later that night he returned to know if there was anything else he could do for her; had she any letters that needed posting at Hone for the late mail? No, there was nothing; but her face bore a reflective look. Presently she gave speech abruptly to what was on her mind.

“He said he was coming back for the funeral; did he say anything else?” she inquired.

David paused, as was his way when having to express his mind in more than monosyllables.

“He asked,” said he, “if, when he came back, I could put him up, and how long he might stay.”

Sabrina bent her thought to the prospect thus opened. “And what did you say?”

"I said he was welcome to stay as long as he wished."

She looked at him with an air of troubled perplexity.

"Did you say that ignorantly," she asked, "or without thinking?"

"I meant it."

"You know he and I are not friends, David?"

"I feared not."

"His staying will mean my going."

"I hope you will think better of that."

"I have left off thinking," she answered; "all that is done with. Mr. Reddie went away to-day at my request; your allowing him to come here again is no kindness to me."

David's manner grew stern. "You are not doing right, Sabra," he said, "to make strife, and let it be so seen now of all times." Directing his glance to the chamber of death, he added, "I reckon her soul was for peace."

"She has it. I gave her that at least; it was all I could do. Now I go my own way. I am not blaming you, David; you have every right to do as you intend, though it leaves me more unfriended and alone than I ever thought to be."

She turned away; her voice had become tremulous.

"You know that's not true," he said.

"Truth is relative; you may not intend it to be true, and yet it is so: better that I should know it now than later. Yes; a woman who fights against bondage has to fight alone. Don't let us speak of it now any more; between old friends, at all events, this is not, as you say, a time for strife. I shall remember, even when it is so no longer, that it was your kindness helped to make this seem home."

David had not a word to say in answer; he left her in gloomy silence. The sadness of his thoughts drove him a-field; with a mind sunk in melancholy

retrospect, he began to wander round the outskirts of the now dark and deserted farm-buildings.

The trouble that weighed upon his spirit had been of gradual growth. He was realizing what many unselfish natures have learned, how far more bitter a test to the resigned heart is the sight of grief and unavailing regret than the happiness which it may not share. The man whose love is of any worth, seeing that, sees in a more irremediable form the downfall of his tenderest hopes; his self-effacement becomes a mockery to him, the schooling of strong desire has been turned all to no purpose, the lower jealousies bestir themselves, and the burning for what might have been becomes well-nigh intolerable.

David's nature contained an element of hardness that was no mere surface development; ever since an act of boyish folly, of which he still bore the reminding mark, he had been hard on himself; and, called to judge in a like case, he was capable, in thought at least, of dealing out hard justice on others. To his mind Sabrina's initial fault was clear: she had married with her eyes open; certain circumstances of Valentine's past had, he imagined, been known to her—all but the actual name of the woman concerned. Later discovery, he supposed, had thrown into more lurid relief an episode till then impersonally regarded; and her revolt was based on remorseful shame and pity, poor substitutes, as he conceived, for what should have guided her course in the first place—and coming then too late.

Blame of the woman he loved roused in David a sort of tender anger that she should ever have allowed herself to fall under his censure, while at the same time jealous sorrow over her unhappiness began to awaken in him unruly elements of passion which till then had lain dormant. Thus it came about from hardly separable causes that, while bringing hard judgment to bear on himself, he was in some measure unjust to her. To his simple and

upright nature, the best solution and cure both for himself and for her seemed to lie in the same direction—Sabrina's reconciliation with her husband; and so, by a strange irony of fate, the day which removed from the scene Valentine's most tender advocate raised up another, and possibly one stronger, to do quiet battle for his cause. Sabrina was still to find herself without an ally in the whole world.

Solitary and late David roamed over the dark fields till at the farm only one light remained. That, he knew, burned in the chamber of death where sat a watcher.

Three days later Mrs. Warham's remains were laid to earth in the Roman Catholic burial-ground, almost within shadow of the walls which had been the scene of her bitter early romance. The Castle blinds were drawn; by a kindly concession which ignored the division of creeds the bell of the parish church was tolled; and at the service many, to whom its ritual was strange, came to pay the last token of respect to a peaceful memory. There was no hearse to give ugliness to the simplicity of the ceremonial; the body was borne to the grave on the shoulders of the Lorry Farm labourers. Sabrina and Betty walked side by side; David and Reddie followed.

During the service in the chapel and by the open grave, Sabrina was continually conscious of her husband's presence. It did not trouble her; she admitted his right to be there. His show of feeling, too, was genuine, for in him the springs of emotion were easily touched. Sabrina alone, among the mourners, stood dry-eyed by the grave when all was over. Presently some one touched her arm; David put into her hand a telegram of sympathy from Lady Berrers that had just arrived; a carriage from the Castle was waiting to take her home. She and Betty shared it; she did not see her husband again that day.

## CHAPTER XLI

### AN INTRUSION

SABRINA'S next few days were much occupied. Sorting, and arranging for the disposal of such of her mother's personal belongings as she could not usefully retain, she rarely left the house. Every one in East Gill had now heard that something was amiss between Valentine Reddie and his wife, for in spite of the fact that they were living under the same roof it was known that they did not meet. Why, then, was Sabrina making such haste to depart, if her future life was to be separate: why was she going at all?

Mystification made people talk the more. Poor neighbours, coming to receive small mementoes of the dead — knickknacks or wearing apparel, spoke to stripped walls and a dismantled room; there was evidently no intention to return. Then came the further news that Betty was passing into domestic service at the farm, where Mrs. Willings could no longer attend singly to the cares of a large establishment.

What is in other people's mouths comes before long to the ears of a quiet listener. David Lorry soon knew that his cousin's private affairs were the talk of the neighbourhood; and the more concerned he became over the irremediable unhappiness of her lot, the more was he disposed to blame her for an attitude that seemed now merely to aggravate the evil.

Valentine, on the contrary, did all that was

possible to correct the singularity of the situation; making opportunity for frequent visits to Wedport, he was often absent during the day; but the fact remained that the farm was his headquarters, and that when he was there Sabrina's doors were shut.

Between Reddie and his host there was not much intercourse; on the few occasions when they met the chief subject of their thoughts was studiously avoided;—by Reddie, because any open discussion of such a matter would be hurtful to his pride, while with David a forbearing sense of loyalty to his cousin sealed his lips. His expressed disapproval was reserved for her ear alone.

One morning, Valentine, looking out across the grass front before the house, noticed, through the open door of an adjacent cottage, the figure of a woman pass, bearing a child in her arms. Though the shadows of the interior lent obscurity, he could not mistake: character in movement carries further than feature. It was his wife.

He turned quickly to David, who at the time chanced to be with him, saying—

“Who is it you have living over there—in that cottage, I mean?”

There was an odd silence.

“Well, it's a woman and a child,” said Lorry. “I should have thought you knew.”

“My wife is there now: that is why I ask.”

“Yes, 'twas she who brought them here.”

Till that moment Valentine had known nothing of the circumstance. Even now it was but a dull suspicion that crossed his mind: these might be mere pensioners, in whom for some reason his wife had taken an interest. Nevertheless starting surmise caused him to ask—

“Whose child is it?”

Again that odd pause.

“Lottie Gage was the mother's name, I believe.”

Stating the fact dispassionately, David let it stand without comment,

A look of uncomfortable amazement disturbed the countenance of his companion. In spite of the vague uneasiness that had prompted the question, Reddie was taken sharply aback. The stroke was shrewd, of the sort he least liked:—here again was his wife doing something he did not understand.

"You are quite sure?" he said, eyeing his informant hard.

"As sure as I can be."

"Did she consult you in the matter?"

"She told me she wished it."

"What did you say?"

"I advised her not."

Reddie took a sharp turn, paced up the room and down, and again stood fronting David.

"Tell me," he said, "do you understand why she has done this?"

"I believe I do."

"Well, I cannot! I shall be glad if you can tell me. I beg you to be quite frank."

"Well, I think she wanted to widen the breach. You see, it's quite the last thing you'd expect, — or, I suppose, wish."

"Yes," replied the other, painfully cogitating. "I believe that you are right." He stood silent for a while; then threw up his head with an air of resolution. "Very well," he said, "my mind is made up!"

Somewhere about an hour later, Sabrina, sitting alone at work, heard a knock at the door. Un-suspectingly she bade the visitant in; but when her husband entered she rose, and in a voice of cold displeasure demanded —

"Why have you come here?"

Reddie let his answer fall with weight; there was anger and resolution in his tone.

"I have come," he said, "because I, at least, wish to keep faith with the dead; because I am your husband, and because you are my wife. I ask now neither for love nor kind judgment, nor

pardon; but for the obedience you owe as a wife, and for the duty which as a daughter you cannot forget."

"And I," replied Sabrina, "have no answer to give: I merely bid you go. I am here only for three days more: surely you might have spared me for so short a time, since it is you who force me to go."

"You mean, because I am here?"

"Yes."

"And that I am driving you out?"

"It appears that here I am not safe from intrusion," she answered.

"And do you mean always," he cried, "to be so mad, so unforgiving, so revengeful? What? Could you, for mere pride, act a lie to your mother when she was dying? Can you face such a thought?"

"Yes," replied his wife, "I can face even that for her sake. She prayed that she might have a happy death. We gave her that, you and I: it was all we could do. Do not repent your share of it, Valentine, by accusing me!"

"Yet I do accuse you," he answered. "Why has time made you more bitter against me than before?"

"It has given me cause."

"I have given you none, Sabra. Since we parted my one thought and aim has been to win you back to me!"

"Yes," she cried, "that is my complaint! Does that seem to you a tolerable excuse for what you have done? It was, I know, your only thought. Ah! I might have forgiven you before, I might have gone back to you in time; but you,—to prepare the way for us both,—you must force sacrifice upon sacrifice, divide a mother from her child, let the child go where it might, to live or die among strangers: and all this so that I might have my precious husband again, and you your



precious wife! That is the way, is it not, for two sinners to deserve happiness?"

"Tell me," he demanded, "though your words are bitter enough to remove any doubt,—have you no scrap of love left for me in your heart—none?"

"I have learned," she replied, "to love other things more."

"Ah, well! let me hear what they are!" he said. "I should be glad to know that my wife had any such feeling left that her pride has not utterly killed!"

"I love," she said, "the things that you have forgotten or ignored,—a poor girl whom you drove into a loveless marriage, the child you forced her to desert: them do I love,—perhaps it is my pride. Ah, Valentine," she went on, and now she spoke no longer bitterly but with a tone of compunction and regret, "when we lived together I did not know you as I do now. We were far more divided then—only we did not know!"

"Indeed," he answered, "I think now that I did not know you."

"So, then, you must own it was a mistake."

"Yes, a mistake," he echoed heavily.

"Do not let us make it again!"

"How again?"

"It would come to that. You and I were never made for each other, Val. It is a rough experience which has taught us that."

He stood looking at her, saying nothing, moody, bitterly wounded in his pride. The quietness of her manner, its cold friendliness, made his defeat more evident.

"Let it be good-bye, Val," she went on. "I shall have no quarrel with you at all then. I wish you more good than you could ever get with me: I give you my hand on that." She held it out.

"No," was his blunt retort; "I will not take your hand since you deny me your lips. You are a proud

woman to-day, Sabra. Perhaps you will be more humble when we meet again."

He flashed at her a look more directly hostile than she had ever received from him, and without another word left the room.

Sabrina stood for a while watching the door as though expecting it to open again and restore him to her sight. Then she drew a long breath partly of pain, partly of relief, and with a sort of mechanical effort resumed her interrupted work.

## CHAPTER XLII

### AN ONLOOKER

VALENTINE REDDIE's movements during the remainder of that day were not without interest as an index to the workings of his mind. Arriving at West Gill about noon, he engaged a room at the Harbour Hotel; then, quitting the small bay, he ascended the cliff path in a westward direction, coming presently to a high headland beyond which, on the neighbouring crest of Hawk's Point, three miles distant, stood the now abandoned signal-station. In the hollow below, about equidistant between the two, lay the new settlement, picked out vividly in fresh black and white from its green surroundings. For the next hour this rectangular row of small dwellings was the object of his fixed attention.

The hour thus spent proved barren of result; save for the smoke that went up from the three small chimney-stacks, no sign of life was to be seen about its walls; no one entered, no one came out. Returning to West Gill between three and four in the afternoon, Valentine strolled up to the harbour-head signal-point, which stood at the end of the cob, and entering into conversation with the coastguard then on duty, inquired casually as to what other men were on the strength.

"I thought I might be seeing Dan Curtis," he remarked.

"Curtis?" answered the man. "He'll be down here on night duty all this week. First watch after flag-fall—six o'clock. He's here most mornings as well."

"Very well," replied Reddie. "It's likely enough, then, that I shall see him to-morrow."

He moved off toward shore, stopping again to chat with a group of fishermen among their boats by the slope of the harbour beach. An hour later the man at the look-out saw him ascending the down on the opposite side of the harbour, returning in the direction of East Gill.

"Mr. Reddie was here asking after you just now," he said to Dan Curtis, when the latter came to relieve him at his post.

"Oh, he was, was he?" remarked the other. He did not speak in a very cordial tone.

To Dan, now he was married, certain events of the past meant more than they had done when first brought to his knowledge. It is no unusual thing for a generous lover after condoning the past to become a jealous husband of his rights. Dan Curtis was one of this sort; and so while obeying the warm dictates of his heart in renewing a damaged suit, he had found a changed value in past friendship. It was not with any keen enthusiasm that he now heard of Valentine Reddie's return to the neighbourhood.

Reddie, meanwhile, was following the track along the ridge toward Amesbay. The hour was propitious for the retrospective mood which he was now cherishing. It was dusk, and the young green of the Castle woods was already shrouded and rendered colourless in the gloom of the hour as he descended to the low-lying fields around East Gill. Going in by way of the farm-building, he encountered David Lorry, and stating briefly the change of his plans, requested that his luggage might be sent over to the Harbour Hotel that evening, as soon as one of the farm hands could be spared for the errand.

"I'm sorry," said David, on hearing that his guest was leaving him in so abrupt a fashion.

"Oh, it's not your fault!" said Reddie; "I've seen

my wife since I saw you. She tells me it is I who am driving her away. Well, good night; if I don't see you again, it's good-bye and many thanks. I expect to be off in two days; what I plan I do quickly."

Valentine was still in no mood for company; continuing his course over the fields toward East Gill village, he resumed the train of thoughts which had been his refuge during the day, thoughts that enabled him to forget the long series of rebuffs, which, culminating in that last interview with his wife, had given so sharp a sting to his conscience, or that nerve-sensitiveness which in a vain man takes its place.

Reddie's constitutional tendency to ignore the past for the sake of the present had become so naturally his philosophy in life, that the reverse of the process now necessary as an aid to his self-esteem threw him into unwonted gloom. In order to avoid thought of a living present so bare of comfort, he preferred to roam the Castle woods with the mildly complaining ghosts of the past. Here, at all events, the gentle memory that walked at his side had not rejected him; the act of renunciation had been his own; it had also, as he now told himself, been to no purpose.

Under the overhanging boughs scant daylight remained when he came to a spot where narrow paths crossed. At one angle of their intersection, moss-grown and disjointed, lay a small piece of stonemasonry, rising no more than a few inches above an immemorial accumulation of dead leaves.

Valentine stood still to contemplate this insignificant ruin, which had for him more interest than its externals warranted. Presently he stooped down, and in idleness, wantoning with his own sad thoughts, lifted one of the stones and passed his hand underneath. The act brought to view the very last thing he had expected, instead of a ghost there was reality awaiting him, a small folded piece of

paper much discoloured, eaten at the edges and made rotten by damp. He remembered then how an unexpected encounter with Lottie had forestalled his last visit to the spot where lovers' letters had been exchanged. In the hurry of ensuing arrangements, the circumstance had slipped his memory, and the letter had lain unclaimed till then. It was now quite undecipherable, at least by such means of illumination as he had at hand; but none the less did it seem significant coming under present circumstances and finding him in so attuned a mood.

He put the paper carefully away in his breast-pocket, and resumed his desultory wanderings. Before long, however, issuing from one of the smaller park wickets, he again turned his steps with intention in the direction of West Gill. Choosing the way of the downs rather than the road, he passed once more along the field-path which led to the Monastery Farm. The last field was bordered upon one side by the farm premises, first by the rick-yard, then by the small barn, and finally by the north end wing of the house and the backs of the two adjoining cottages.

Here his eye was attracted by a light in one of the windows; its blinds had not been drawn, and the field, with only a ditch of nettles intervening, ran flush with the wall through which the window now made an opening of light. It occurred to Reddie that here was a means of reading whatever remained legible of the letter which he had just found.

As he drew near for that purpose, a complete interior presented itself to view, bright and small and orderly, like a painting by a Dutch master. On a table toward the centre burned a candle; over the whitewashed walls of the room sprang brisk fire-light, giving a ruddy polish to its plain furniture, and flecking the faces of the two women who were its occupants.

The younger of these sat before the hearth on a low stool, fastening to the front of her dress the flap of a large apron, which already covered her knees, and descended in ample folds to the edge of her gown. On the floor at her feet stood a large basin half-filled with water; a kettle steamed on the hob; two towels were airing on the fender-bar. Nearer to the hearth stood her companion, pinning small articles of apparel to a line that hung from right to left of the projecting chimney-piece. A soft steamy warmth filled the room, casting a blur upon the window-pane, through which the onlooker's eye steadfastly regarded these peaceful details of a domestic event over which the sedentary figure appeared to preside.

Across the wide safe lap which a low seat affords, lay face-downwards, in a white roll of drapery, the object of all this provision of cleanliness and warmth; down its back a loosening of small tapes and strings revealed deep layers of undergarments, resembling not a little the folds of a pen-wiper; all was ready to do off, like a split rind provocative for peeling; in a word, the washing of a small baby was about to commence.

The nursing mother now bared her arm, and leaning toward the basin, dipped her elbow into the water. Finding it too warm, she signalled for cold to be added; when the temperature had been thus adjusted to her liking the real business began. With deft handling she rid the babe of its trappings; in their place a folded towel was drawn across her knees. Free at last from all restraint of body and limb, leaping with the leaping fire-light, propped on sustaining hands, the lusty youngster danced and crowed. He seemed to throw out a valiant challenge to the world to come on, and, incapable as yet of standing alone, kicked time with martial tramp on the edge of a precipice. The hands that held him gave way, he fell back protesting to the lap he wished to spurn. Sabrina's laugh rang.

The babe lay on his back and fought with arms and legs at the face which bent down to receive the caress of his tiny blows; he caught her hair and drew it down into utter disarray, and she nuzzled and bit tenderly at the dimpled joints of soft fat arms and small shoulders. Quiet noises of a mother and her cub at play passed into the outer air—strange enough to the ears that heard them then! Strange, too, it was to see so much joy packed into such brief space. The child was still clamouring for its game when cleanliness smote in with soft gloves of lather, and the small anatomy became curd from head to foot. Impotent he sprawled and kicked, jerking his back like one who learns swimming on dry land, protesting with small grunts that had no unhappiness in their complaint. Then followed the dip and the sponging of the screwed-up face, while the head turned sharply to right and left, seeking escape from so uncomfortable a sequel to its joys. And then at last the leap back into dry warmth, and the folded game of the mother and her cub at play.

All this Valentine Reddie saw; and as he watched he forgot for a time the purpose which had brought him to that opening into a paradise where he had no place. Not till all was done, the drying, the airing, the powdering, the mysterious pinning of soft binders this way and that, the reclothing for bed, and the final disappearance of the two into the upstairs chamber, did the spell that had bound him relax its hold. Even then, as one half stunned, he continued to gaze into the empty room, musing on what he had seen. Slowly independence of thought and action seemed to return to him: he stepped across the dry ditch of nettles, and, leaning against the window-frame, drew out and held up to the light the weather-worn scrap of paper which had come to hand so strangely out of date.

The writing upon it was brief, only a few words were decipherable here and there, yet they seemed



enough to give some fixity of thought to his mind. "Ah, yes!" he murmured softly to himself, "there, at least, I made no mistake."

He was still standing intent over the faint ink-marks, and endeavouring to read more, when the sound of feet descending the stairs caused him to draw away from the aperture. Looking back, he saw that Sabrina had re-entered the room alone. For a few moments he regarded her with a curious intentness of gaze, a bitter smile crossed his lips; then with a short nod, which might have been either of asseveration or greeting, he returned to the footpath by which he had come, and disappeared into the night.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### A QUARREL BETWEEN FRIENDS

SABRINA heard the next morning that her husband was gone, and did not mean to return. The news made her feel less of a prisoner than she had done for the last week; but her spirits were heavy, now that the day of her own departure was near. While other things had brought discomfort and misery more than she could well bear to look back on, acceptance of her surroundings had found a way to her heart; and had the choice been now open to her, she could willingly have made East Gill her home, and given up all thought of change. All the more was it bitter to her, when parting drew near, to feel that she was going away under a cloud. David, when they met now, hardly spoke to her, and for the most part kept out of her way. What had happened less obviously on other occasions happened on this morning again, when Sabrina, entering the kitchen garden and advancing toward the gate which led into the orchard, saw her cousin stop and turn back from the course he had till then been following.

For this once, however, she was not to be put off. When she called to him he was obliged to await her pleasure.

"David," she said, speaking as calmly as she might under this fresh evidence of his coldness, "why do you never speak to me now?"

"Because I have nothing to say," he replied, bluntly.

"Nothing kind to say, you mean," she answered with a slight catch of voice.

"Nothing that would be any good, is what I mean."

"That is to say, you not only disapprove of what I have done, but believe that I am altogether deaf to reason."

He was silent.

"You think me wilful as well as wrong?"

His nod gave curt assent. Sabrina's colour rose, but her glance hardened.

"Well, I did not expect you so to misjudge me, David," she said; "I had thought that at least I should always have one friend on whom I could rely in need."

For that dishonest speech he gave her a short explicit look, and waited for no more.

She repaired her fault at once; following him she said, humbly—

"Forgive me, David, I know you are my friend; but have I not some excuse just now if I speak bitterly? I am in trouble, and you treat me as hardly, as rigorously, as though I—as if I were—yourself!"

"Isn't that the best way?"

"Not always—not of a man to a woman."

"You told me once not to think of that."

"Yes; you remind me how much things have changed with me since then. Don't treat me like a man, David!"

"Behave more like a woman, then!"

"You say I am unwomanly?"

"Unwomanlike I do say you are, Sabra."

"Because, as a rule, women have not courage to face the truth; they accept compromise, or rather prefer surrender."

"Oh, I grant," answered her cousin, "you have courage enough of a left-handed sort!"

"Why do you call it left-handed?"

"Because of what 'tis leading to. You are not

defending yourself or any one else from wrong now; you are only stirring up strife. You are not trying after peace, or agreement, or anything that's seemly; you are going on just like that bird-scatterer over there!"

He pointed up to a small wheel which whirred continuously above the summer-house roof, irrespective of the time of year and the purpose it was intended to subserve. The parable was too galling for Sabrina to bear with equanimity.

"Do you think," she cried, "to make me see the value of your advice by injurious comparisons?"

David was pitilessly truthful. "You didn't come just now," said he, "to ask my advice; nor did you mean to take it if given. You only wanted me to approve of what you are doing, while I'm all for thinking of the harm already done, and wishing you'd end it."

"You talk as if it were I who had done the harm?" she exclaimed, with rising warmth, finding it hard to accept blame on matters that had put her resolution and endurance so sharply to the test.

"Ay!" he answered, "for I know nothing in this world more hurtful than a sensible woman when she's moved to folly."

Sabrina whitened; such testimony to her usual good sense made the taunt only the more bitter.

"Now, David," she said, "you shall have no more excuse for your black looks and silence! Let me know what I have done! Yes; I will have your version of it. Go on; I will not interrupt you! I can be unwomanlike, for I will keep my word."

"That's a womanly way of putting it," said David, with rather a bitter smile. Then he spoke. "Nothing you're doing now can alter what's done; when a thing's settled, anger only means pride. What has been your aim all along?"

"First, to repair an injustice; now, not to give in to wrong."

"That's past repair by the tack you're on now, Sabra. The wrong's there; fighting won't end it. All you are doing is to make it stand out like a haystack for folks to stare and be curious about. Will that do any good?"

"So that is why you wish me to yield?—to help you and Mr. Reddie to keep up appearances. I care too little about such things."

"Put away question of yourself—what you care or don't care about," he replied. "There are others to be considered as well,—how it affects them."

"That depends upon whether they value appearances more than honest dealing, as you seem to do. You are making me interrupt now."

"Yes," he said, "you are just as likely to be convinced of your folly out of your own mouth as out of mine."

The remark was merely uttered to the point, without intentional rudeness; an indication that David Lorry's straight speaking was not of a kind easy to submit to.

"No," she said, stung anew to bitterness by his tone, "let me hear of it from a friend: that will be so encouraging! One thing that in my folly I wished for has come about: Mr. Reddie has gone. Are you for calling him back?"

"Your husband," he answered, "has every right to be here as things stand. So far as I am concerned, if he wishes to come back the house is open to him. That I do stand by. I'm sorry enough that he should have gone."

"Your sorrow need not be brief; call him back! I can go to-morrow if necessary."

"That is as you will," he replied. "It makes me sorrier than I can say."

"You give me no choice."

"I give you no true cause, Sabra."

"Though you have said that any day Mr. Reddie may return, and that if he comes you welcome him?"

"Yes," said David, "I do say that."

"Then you have my answer." For all her injured feelings, Sabrina could not refrain from making one personal appeal. "Why, David," she inquired hardily, "have you taken sides with him against me?"

"That's not true."

"It *is* true! You think that he is right, and that I am wrong."

"I don't think you are right: that is all."

"I wish you would tell me why!"

"Because," he said, "you are crying out now over what you knew well enough before. A more proper pride would have kept you from giving yourself where you did. It's no use showing pride now, when the shame of a bad bargain comes home to you. It's not courage, it's cowardice, to do that now."

Sabrina stood amazed to hear him. What he said seemed to her a hostile rather than a wrongly based judgment of her acts; and in her anger she failed to perceive where his knowledge was at fault, or to guess how her own words had on a former occasion discounted the justice of her cause.

"Well, David," she said, "if you can think that of me, it is indeed time that we said good-bye. Let us say it at once and have done with it. If I have to be here two more days, I hope that will not be too much for your endurance."

David turned about, letting his eye range abroad, intent on weather-signs of wind and sky.

"Go when you like, Sabra," he said; "but you've always been welcome here, and so you would be again."

"It would be an empty welcome," she answered, "for it could not be the same. Sad it is how one has to learn to think differently of friends in whom one has trusted."

"'Twould be sad if it were true," answered David; "but there's no necessity for it that I can see. I

can't ever think differently of you, Sabra." He added, somewhat inconsequently, "Would to God I could!"

Sabrina was in doubt whether to take his last word in a favourable or an unfavourable sense. As she paused, finding herself unable to speak, she too turned away her face. So they stood, neither looking at the other, both silent. Sabrina was the first to move. Without a word she left him, and walked slowly back to the house.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### WEAK WOMAN

DAN CURTIS was not a demonstrative man; but beneath his phlegmatic exterior he kept a tender heart. On this particular morning, after crossing the threshold on his way out to work, he turned back and kissed his wife.

Apparently the act had reference to something that had gone before. Lottie flushed, a look of shy pleasure stole into her face.

"You are pleased, Dan?" she asked.

"Eh, lass!" he replied, "but I am! I reckon that'll make things all right now!"

So they parted, and Lottie was left alone to her small household cares and to meditation. On the whole she too felt pleasure and contentment. It was a wife's triumph legitimately earned, an experience—always so sweet when it comes—of the power which weak natures may sometimes hold over the strong.

Dan Curtis had been moody since his return home on the previous night—almost unbearable at last, and with no apparent reason for it all, till his wife's statement that she was going into West Gill that afternoon to do shoppings caused him to break out. He forbade her to leave the house, and in plain words let it be known why.

This would ordinarily have been a signal for tears: but now Lottie only began to blush. Choosing the right moment for letting go a reserve which she had treasured shamefacedly during the



past week—"Dan, you're silly," she said, and stopped his mouth by a few words. It was the news then conveyed which had caused the coast-guard to turn back and kiss his wife just before leaving. All the same, he took her basket, saying that he would do her shoppings. The wind was then blowing up for rain, with a promise of dirty weather before nightfall. In that case he would probably be kept down at the harbour all day: stress of weather caused extra work, and when storm threatened Dan was generally put on to duty at the life-boat station, he being one of the picked hands.

Lottie admired her husband's prowess and the record that stood to his name: and for some reason to-day, during the long hours of solitude, her mind grew soft toward the big fellow with his childish blue eyes. "Dan's just the kind to go and get himself drowned!" was the thought to which she came in the course of her meditations, and, finding a sort of enjoyment in the piteousness of that prospect, she let her mind dwell on it. Before many minutes were over she had dropped a tear on Dan's memory, and, having come to that pass, feeling in need of a little comfort and human intercourse, she left her work and went out to seek a chat with her next-door neighbour.

Mrs. Owens' door, however, was locked: evidently she was out. The two bachelor occupants of the third house were probably now asleep, having been on duty from midnight till nine that morning. Lottie thus found herself alone. Mr. Owens was close by on signal-duty; but except for him there was probably no other human being stirring within a mile.

She returned to her own door and stood looking at the weather. The day had now taken a decided turn for the worse, and the outlook was not encouraging. The fitful sunshine of the early morning hours was gone; low grey clouds were

hurrying along with ever-increasing density in a north-easterly direction. From below the cliff could be heard the peculiar alternation of sigh and growl which comes from the sea-drawn shingle along all that stretch of coast. It was then nearly half-way on to full tide: there was not yet much wind, but a gale was evidently not far off. Any doubt in her mind as to what the night was going to be was suddenly resolved by a curious sound which now for the first time struck her ears. It came from below, seeming to proceed not so much from the shore as from the ground, and resembled the hollow moan of some animal in pain. Coming from a spot where no animal could be, it acquired a character of its own, weird and haunting and infinitely depressing to the imagination. The sound rose at regular intervals, like the tolling of a minute-bell, or, to be more exact, timing itself to the periodic advance of the breaking surf.

Though she had hitherto only known it by repute, the sound at once explained itself to Lottie's ears: it was caused by the sea entering one of the many caves with which, in this district, the coast-line is honeycombed, arising in combination with certain conditions of tide, wind, or atmosphere, which occurred only at rare intervals. A sound of this sort, coming to the ears of people so immemorally superstitious as were the natives of this lonely region, is bound to acquire some fateful significance; and the local adage, by many firmly believed, "If the sea-cow sound, a man will be drowned," recurring now to Lottie's memory, did not help to diminish the vague apprehensions which she had been idly and almost pleasurably indulging.

She knew the actual spot well, and had never before had reason to regard it with any superstitious aversion. It had, in fact, been a summer-day place of meeting between herself and Valentine during the happy early days of their intimacy,

when a few hours' extra leave or a whole holiday had enabled them to meet at a spot thus conveniently near while safely closed from observation.

Dan Curtis had not returned for the midday meal, and if he did not come during the next hour Lottie was not to expect him till his full round of duty was over—that is to say, not till after midnight. Feeling now thoroughly melancholy, and longing for Mrs. Owens' reappearance, she took up her station at the door of her cottage, and stood looking out over the track in the direction of West Gill.

As she lingered, the figure of a man appeared over the top of the neighbouring down, coming towards her. It was not her husband, nor any other of the coastguards, although his gait seemed familiar. The precise moment of her recognition of him was signaled by a sudden parting of the lips and a deep rush of colour to the face; she began to tremble. The other, meanwhile, came on at a fast rate, as though he were walking against time, and with his mind thoroughly made up to defeat that old enemy of the human race. He had accomplished half the descent, and the familiar features of his face had become distinguishable before Lottie had resolved on any course of action. With a curious dragging movement, suggesting infirmity either of body or will, she turned, crept into the house, and put to the door. She did not close it; she went and sat down with her back to the window, and waited.

Presently she heard the expected step: was it coming, or was it merely going by? The moment of suspense was soon over; the door yielded to a push from without. "Lottie!" cried the voice she loved.

She turned her head with a miserable childlike look of supplication.

"Oh, Fred," she murmured, "why have you come here?"

"For the only possible or imaginable reason," he answered. "To see you."

"But I don't want you to see me," she said; "please go away!"

"Who taught you to say that?"

"Dan wouldn't like it; he'd be angry. He heard tell you were somewhere about, and he said I wasn't to see you. He was very particular about it."

"Ah! he's jealous, I suppose? Well, perhaps he'll have reason to be now."

"Oh no, indeed, that he hasn't," cried Lottie; "he shan't have! Please, Fred,—Mr. Reddie, I mean,—do, do as I ask you, and go at once!"

"Lottie," said Valentine, "I will go soon enough if you tell me to, when you have heard what I am going to say. But, first of all, before I can believe anything, you must let me see your face."

She turned without hope or effort to resist him, but her eyes were still lowered. She sat screwing her fingers together, with a shamed, frightened look upon her face. Valentine contemplated her; she was still very fair.

"Lottie, look at me!" he said.

She raised her eyes.

"I have come to take you away with me. Will you go?"

She shook her head, voiceless.

"Wait, and I will tell you why. I have learned now what things are best for a man; love that is faithful without bitterness is the only love worth having. My wife no longer loves me; so I have come back for you. Do you hear what I say, Lottie?"

Again there was silence. He repeated, "Do you hear what I say?"

"Oh yes, I hear." The whispered words made scarcely a sound.

"Well, will you not come?"

She shook her head.

"Why? Do you not love me still?"

"Yes."

"As much as ever?"

"Yes."

"Then it stands to reason, — you will come. It is only just now that the idea frightens you. Now listen! I have something to tell you: yesterday I saw the child — yours and mine; you had to part with him when you married. Well, that was all a mistake: come with me, and he shall be yours still. A loveless marriage is no marriage, Lottie; I have found that out. Do you think yourself bound?"

"Yes, that's it: I am."

"What? Do you love him, too, then?"

"I don't know — at first I didn't." Her voice grew lamentable. "But now I know I shall."

"What do you mean — you don't and you shall?"

"Because ——"

"Yes, go on!"

"Because — something's going to happen; I know — I feel sure of it! And so — however much I might wish — I daren't go away and leave him now. Oh! if you had only come sooner, sooner! If you had only said then that I might have my boy again! — yes, it's almost what she said, too! Oh, it's wicked of me, I know; but I would, I would have come! Yes, God help me, I would, for I couldn't have said no, then! But now it's all altered, and I can't come, though I might like to; I can't even think of it! Oh, go away! please, please, Mr. Reddie; do be kind to me and go!"

"Not yet," he said, "not yet!"

Before she had time to guess what was coming he held her fast embraced.

"Lottie," he cried, "my Lottie, my own, my very own!"

She hung in his arms with closed eyes, abandoning herself to the joy.

"Say now!" he whispered at last. "Is it 'No,' or 'Yes'?"

"Yes," she murmured, "yes!" He let her go; she stood with opened eyes as one emerging from a trance. When he began to speak of plans, her hand went up to her head; she moved slowly to a chair and sat down. In a little while she got up again and began moving restlessly about the room, taking things up and laying them down again. Presently she turned to him, saying, in a plaintive tone of entreaty, "Will you just go outside for a while, please; I—I want to be alone. I've to do things; and I can't think with you here."

She spoke and moved almost mechanically. Valentine stepped toward the door.

"Don't be long, my Lottie," he whispered tenderly. "Say you'll not be long."

"No, not long!" she echoed in a dull tone. "Only do go now!"

She waited, hearkening to his departing footsteps; as soon as the door was between them a look of cunning and frightened intentness came into her face. Softly she put to the door, locked and bolted it; then slowly and feebly she crossed the room to the further chamber, shifted the key from the outer to the inner lock, turned it, and stood holding it with weak hands.

Thus she remained minute after minute, waiting, listening, with a growing chillness at her heart. From without came a faint sound, a voice calling her name, a knock at the outer door. Violent trembling seized her. "Oh, God help me! God help me!" she cried. She threw herself forward upon the bed, and writhed as though in physical agony, with fingers pressed desperately to her ears. Then a delivering sense of darkness fell upon her brain; and she heard no more.

## CHAPTER XLV

### VALENTINE PAYS HIS DEBT

At the Harbour inn that evening Valentine Reddie appeared to be in his element; free-handed, jovial, easy of speech, ready of access to all, he stood the centre of an admiring throng. The bar was full; good enough reason lay within, and better stayed without; fresh comers were slow to depart; each opening of the door was for ingress only. A rattle of the handle, signalling each new arrival, was followed by a swift operation of opening and shutting; then there appeared upon the scene a rain-spattered figure propelled by invisible forces, whose final manifestation came in a claustral crash upon the lock, as though exit were thenceforth forbidden.

On each of these occasions, though a high wooden partition stood between door and chamber, the lights swung down with gusty violence; while the new-comer, divesting himself of oil-skin or tarpaulin, volunteered some extenuating remark on the rude turmoil without. What would have most struck any one strange to the district was the mildness of description which seemed to satisfy the native mind. It was agreed that the night was unsettled — threatening, one might even say; but the majority seemed to regard its character as undetermined, and to let it still be an open question whether the half-gale now blowing were not all that one had to expect. Yet, to an eye peering out from the bay window of the inn, sharply broken

lights and ridges of foam told that the inner waters of the harbour were already approaching the conditions of an open sea.

To these natives, learned in the storms of their own coasts, but home-dwellers who had seen few horizons save that within which they had been born, Valentine talked after the manner of one who calls no single country his home. He talked well, beating up an enthusiasm for his subject that was infectious: to travel was, he declared, man's truest instinct—the best way to see life. After all, having a home meant ties, limitations; men who married had often to give up more than they gained; travellers, on the other hand, were the youngest men on earth—they kept their youth. This, though not quite in these words, was the doctrine he preached, with tale after tale of men who had lived that sort of life and done well. But the moral was not addressed to his hearers; he was not, indeed, conscious that any moral was intended; he talked merely to put thought out of mind.

Away at the back of his brain lay a horrid consciousness of defeat that had to be fought down. The "Now go!" of two women, so opposed in character, the one so proud, the other so humble, had overthrown the balance of his mind. He had schemed a fine dramatic exit, a dealing out of punishment and reward where both were due. And now, though he could have staked his life on the issue, instead of success had come failure. There was the wonder! The rebuff which this weak woman had dealt to him was more amazing, more ignominious, than that which had come from another and a stronger hand. Because she had thrown him more out of his reckoning, had beaten him when he least suspected difficulty—therefore Lottie had now become more important to him than Sabrina. Could he, at that moment, have been given his choice between those two, so fresh and keen was his sense of humiliation that he



would have cried "Lottie," and taken her for the fuller satisfaction of his pride. Lottie, who had yielded almost at a word, who could not resist him when he spoke, she who had been his in a degree that his wife had never been, had, after all, managed, in her poor, weak, shrinking way, to deal him the same blow. Yes, even in defeat, she had conquered him! In the dusk, peering through a small window, he had seen her lying upon her bed with face averted, deaf to his call, and then—Mrs. Owens had come. That, too, was an uncomfortable fact to remember; he had not seen Dan Curtis yet; before long the story would get to his ears; what then ought he to do? Could he in honour leave Lottie to face possible accusation and trouble of which he himself was the cause? And if he saw Dan, what was he to tell him—the truth? Hardly that.

Valentine Reddie was indeed a strange solitary in disguise, as he stood that night in the inn parlour, the liveliest and merriest of them all. Many remembered afterwards what good company he had been—"As nice a gentleman as you could ever wish to meet," was the word of one.

Seven o'clock struck. A man in tarpaulins and sou'-wester tapped sharply on the bay window, and putting his face against the pane, shouted, "Boats!" It was a signal that many had been half expecting. The force of the wind was causing a higher tide than had been reckoned for, and hands were now needed to get some of the boats further up shore.

Most of the men in the bar turned out to help.

Reddie, for a diversion, went with them: it was something to do.

All the hauling that was necessary was done in the next ten minutes. It happened then that signalling was going on between the jetty-head station and some vessel out at sea. A few of the fishermen went up on to the cob to see whether it were

a case of ship in distress. Valentine, glad of an excuse to step out and be face to face with those strong external forces of wind and spray, accompanied them.

They advanced along the rough sloping seawall, over the further end of which waves now and again broke in sudden spurts of foam, and ran back in small streams along the channels and interstices of the stone-work.

At its half-way point, West Gill jetty takes a sudden curve, here confronting the full force of the sea, which in anything like a real storm renders it impassable. To-night, however, it was a mere matter of watching for an opportunity to run the gantlet of the bigger waves which now and again broke over. Up to this point there was fairly dry standing, and for men clad as were Reddie and his companions, small chance of a serious drenching. Nevertheless, since the tide had scarcely yet lost headway, they took their stand on the safe side just within the curve. One of the men had his glass with him.

"Ay," he said, after steady scrutiny, "it's a brig bound east. Wants to know if she can make the harbour to-night."

"Well, I'll tell her she can't!" commented one of the group. "She'd better stand out again, and not lie inside the spool at all, unless she's sure of her ground. She'd better have kep' outside the light-ship altogether, to my thinking."

"Ah! Where does that lie from here?" inquired Reddie. "Can one make her out in this weather?"

One of the men gave him the direction. "Her light's off just now, though," said he.

While Valentine watched, a slight figure wrapped in a cloak, and leaning hard against the wind, came hurrying along the jetty from the shore. No one in the group appeared yet to have noticed the newcomer, and she, as if wishful to escape recognition,

kept away to the further side, passing with bent and slightly averted head.

"Yes, yes, there she is at last!" cried Valentine, as the light he was watching for revolved into view.

At the sound of his voice the woman started; she turned her face, at the same time quickening her step.

"Lottie!" cried Reddie; and, seeing whither she was bound, he sprang forward with a sudden impulse of fear.

She, too, finding concealment no longer possible, as though impelled by his movement to fresh speed, darted ahead.

"Dan, Dan!" she cried, in a piteous wail of entreaty and terror; and, with the word, she was gone utterly, swallowed up in darkness, while the night still tingled to her cry.

In the heavy dash and roar of the re-buffed waves no sound of that light fall came up from below; but Valentine, running along the jetty's edge, caught sight, and threw up his arms.

"My God!" cried a man from behind, "there's a woman drowned!"

At that moment Valentine's form disappeared.

"And a man, too!" cried another. "God love us all! That was Mr. Reddie! There's only one man I know as can live in a sea like that!" He ran up the jetty toward the signal-point where Dan Curtis was on night-duty. "Out with a boat! Bring her round!" he shouted back to those remaining behind.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### VALENTINE AND LOTTIE JOIN HANDS

THREE hours later a messenger arrived at Lorry's Farm bringing word of the event. David, hearing that some one was come over from West Gill, went out and received the news.

From the porch, while he stood and listened to the man's brief statement of the catastrophe, he could see the lighted blind of Sabrina's chamber. There he would presently be entering, charged with this message of death,—strange end to the barrier of silence which their late contention had raised between them! A sort of shame, a tender remorse over their estrangement, grew in this lover at the thought of thus meeting her again, and seeing from that dear face the cold resentment fall away, forgotten in the receipt of disastrous tidings.

"You understand what I say's the truth?" concluded the messenger, seeing him stand so silent and unmoved. "I didn't come in no hurry to bring worse news than need be: I waited till there wasn't a hope left. They be both dead, not a doubt of that. What'll the widow say to it?"

"Man," broke in David Lorry, abruptly, "go you and get out the trap? There's one round at the stables;—a maid shall go across and show ye the way. Every man Jack's in bed and asleep by now and I don't want to rouse the house. And for myself, I'm due up yonder now."

He entered, groping his way up the side-staircase in the dark. Before he knocked, Sabrina

recognized his step; she was surprised to receive a visit from him at such an hour.

As he entered, their eyes met: she knew then that he had something to tell. He stood with the door in his hand and did not move.

"Yes, David, come in," she said, after waiting for him to speak. "Is anything the matter? Why do you stand there?"

"I've not come to stay," replied her cousin. "There's bad news for you. Will you be ready if I tell it?"

"At once!" cried Sabrina; and then with a sudden fear catching her heart, thought of the child, and fell back upon the arms of her chair for support. "Quick!" she whispered, "or I shall be thinking worse than I need. Has he ——"

David was mercifully brief.

"Your husband has been drowned trying to save a life off West Gill jetty."

Sabrina rose with a face from which all colour had flown.

"Tell me again," she said at last, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"Word's only just come," replied David. "That's the bulk of it; he's been drowned, just."

"Yes, yes; but saving life, you said?"

"He tried."

Sabrina's face still strained for further news.

"There was too big a sea on: he wasn't swimmer enough."

At that word of forlorn and wasted effort a quick sob checked her utterance: she spoke with difficulty.

"Is he ——? Have they ——? Oh, tell me! Did no one do anything?"

"Ay, they got him to land; but it was too late."

"Then — then it is possible for me to see him? I can go: I can be with him?"

"If you wish it."

"Oh, at once! Take me!"

"The trap will be round in a few minutes," answered David. "I reckoned you would wish to go. Yes, I can hear it moving out in the yard."

Sabrina threw on bonnet and shawl; there was no waiting.

"I'll just go and get an extra rug," said her cousin. "The night's chilly, you'll find."

She was beyond such considerations, and without reply went down with him to the stable-yard, where the trap stood ready.

David helped her to her seat, and wrapped the rugs well over her.

"You can drive, I suppose?" he said to the man who had brought them word. "I'll follow."

He spoke in a half-ashamed tone of apology, avoiding her glance. Sabrina understood.

"You drive me!" she whispered. "You won't mind? I—want a friend."

David, dumb with a gratitude he could not express, got up beside her and took the reins. Afterwards Sabrina remembered with a strange distinctness what then only passed through her consciousness like a dream: the long roundabout drive by road under dark night and gusty rain, and the absolute silence of her cousin's companionship. Now and then he spoke to the horse; not once to her. The only outward sign of the care for her that was in his mind was when once he turned and drew more closely about her the rugs which she had let slip to her knee. That hour of darkness, silence, and close comradeship laid a balm upon her strained nerves of which she only realized the comfort afterwards.

A spray-washed air drove up from the bay and beat into their faces as they descended toward the shore. Beyond the harbour, from the hollow of night, rose the roar of the sea. Here and there a lantern swung, borne by hand; out on the point the steady sea-signals burned, blurred in a hurl of foam. The lights along jetty and shore were caught

up here and there in sickly patches on wet cobble stones, boat-sacks, tarpaulins, and the oil-skin coats of fishermen. A group of men standing about by the old life-boat house touched their hats as Sabrina passed them; she was conscious that at her approach silence fell on them.

There was no vulgar gazing on sorrow; some of the men drew away to a distance; an old salt, keeper of the keys, came up to unlock the door. "Tom, fetch up a light," he called to one of the dispersing group. "We didn't reckon as any one 'ud be here so soon, or we'd 'a been ready for ye," he explained apologetically.

David, with an understanding nod, received the lantern from him in silence, and led the way in; Sabrina followed closely.

On a sloped strip of boat-flooring at the far end of the shed lay two bodies roughly composed to their last sleep. No conventional attitude of folded hands had been imposed on those wrecked pieces of humanity to indicate either resignation or rest: the lines were those of exhausted slumber and energies laid prostrate. So close together lay the two forms, so straight of limb, that the dead hands all but touched; a few inches only separated one head from the other.

As David lifted the lantern, directing its rays upon the faces of the dead, a low breath of wonder fell from Sabrina's lips. She stood rigidly gazing on the form that lay farthest: her eyes grew wide for the brain to look out. Scarcely above a whisper she spoke at last—

"It was for her, then! Poor soul; oh, poor soul!"

There are times when nothing so defeats the reasoning faculty as the bare visible fact presented to the view,—the result, apart from the sequent causes which have led up to it. The sight deals a rebuff which the brain is unable to meet, and for a while a deep, and almost fundamental doubt of the

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senses arises in the soul; it stands bewildered in a body that can give no explanation of the source whence the blow has come. So it was in a deadened and almost unmoved tone that, after a long silence, Sabrina again spoke.

"How beautiful they are!" she said, and taking the lantern from her cousin's hand, held it over the faces of that quiet pair. A minute later the door of the boathouse opened and shut softly again. "David?" said Sabrina, and from the welcome silence which followed, knew that she had been left alone.

How beautiful they were! Any stranger must have acquiesced in that verdict. Youth by itself has beauty, the beauty of health and strength. But these broken lives had a further claim: they had been singled for looks in their own narrow world when alive, and death had detracted nothing as yet from the comeliness which, under the rigour of its law, must from this hour pass into waste.

Valentine Reddie had fought his last round, gallant as ever to win the applause of men. Out on the quay even now old weather-beaten salts grumbled of his folly: he, no real swimmer, to fling himself away in a sea like that! Sabrina, more ignorant, more fond, gave him the credit of his recklessly forlorn hope.

She turned to the other one. There, by his side, lay the woman into whose life he had brought nothing but ill; foolish and loyal as she had been, she too had her triumph at last: possession was hers now. Something in that dead face stirred Sabrina into meek protest.

"No, no!" she whispered, "I never meant to stand in your way, or be your rival! I am not that now. If you can forgive the dead, forgive the living too!"

Weeping, she stooped down and kissed the fair face; then, after a pause, as if to master some final



revolt of pride, she gave to her dead man also the mark of reconciliation and peace.

Continued nearness of a living person to a dead body brings after a while the impression almost of restored life. A strange sense of community becomes established; something passes from the dead to the living, something from the living to the dead. So in the watch which then began, Sabrina, surrendering her mind to that presence of silence which death is, felt less and less alone; responsive consciousness seemed to come from the two forms whose grounds of separation and union she knew.

She sat down beside them on the wooden framework that formed their resting-place: on its perforated incline the bodies and what garments had been left on them had been drained almost dry. In some stage of the attempts to revive them warmth must have been applied; over the dead girl's forehead the bright hair had begun to crisp again and reach out light tendrils that a breath would stir, but from Valentine's brow it stood up in a rigid wave as though some great mental shock had passed over the dead brain and left its mark. A wish that she could give peace to all that lay under the sight thus presented to her gaze grew like hunger in Sabrina's mind.

"Oh, Val!" she cried, and laid her hand on the dead man's; "oh, Val!"

The touch, so different now, conveying so vast a change, brought memory of the last time their hands had met, — only that then his right had been joined to her left. Following the train of thought thus started, she leaned over and covered with a gentle clasp the hand she had parted from in enmity. Close by it now lay another smaller one; that also Sabrina reached and touched. Then, by an instinctive movement, she gave expression to the longing for reconciliation that filled her. Under the warm living hand cold fingers met in a passive clasp, — strange reversal of another scene.

Twice during the night David entered, and found her each time sitting in the same posture, hand in hand with the dead.

"No," she said each time, in answer to his look of inquiry. "I do not wish to go yet."

On each occasion he brought in fresh lights to replace those which were nearly burned down; and having performed the necessary service, retired in his usual quiet fashion, saying no word.

In the early grey of the morning the door opened once more to admit an incomer; but this time it was not David Lorry. By sight alone Sabrina would not have known him, but a first glance at that face of open sorrow told her who it must be. He touched his forehead, sailor fashion, as he advanced, and stopping short at the foot of the bier, repeated the gesture with an apologetic air.

"Are you Dan Curtis?" inquired Sabrina; "I think you must be."

"Yes, ma'am; I hope you pardon my coming."

"You have as much right to be here as I."

"Thank you, ma'am, for saying so, I am sure. Well, I suppose I have. It's been a bad business for us all; a terrible night's work! And I can't make out, even now, how it came about."

He spoke with the impassiveness of a man on whom sorrow rests like a dead weight.

"Tell me," said Sabrina, "if you can bear to speak of it, all you actually know."

But, though the chief actor in that vain rescue of the already drowned, Dan had not much to tell. The unexplained cause of the tragedy weighed upon his mind.

"I can't for the life of me think what brought her there!" he said again, when the narrative was done. "'Twas to see me about something I've not a doubt, but I shall never know what it was now. Poor lass, 'twas a cruel hard way for her. I was out there on duty, and I heard her call twice quite plain, 'Dan, Dan!' That was her very last word. Sure, it

seems fate — a thing coming like that, and all done so sudden like.”

“Yes,” answered Sabrina; “no doubt it was what we call fate.” After a pause she said: “Mr. Curtis, we know nothing of how this came about, — we may never know, — but if it should prove to have been in any way my husband’s fault will you try to forgive him, remembering this, at least, that as far as he could he has paid his debt now?”

Dan Curtis understood from her tone more than was spoken.

“Did you know, then, ma’am?” he inquired. And without flinching from that avowal, “Yes, I knew!” she answered, and turned her face back to quiet contemplation of the dead.

Then there was silence for a time. At last Dan spoke again.

“Ah well, she was rare fond of him, I know. And it don’t do neither of us any harm now, — or good, that I can see. Poor lass, poor wee lass!”

His voice thickened, he turned abruptly and walked slowly to the door.

Seeing that he was going, Sabrina also rose and followed.

“And you will — you will try to forgive him?” she said in a voice of humble entreaty.

“Oh ay!” he answered heavily, “you can’t owe enmity to a dead man: there’s no reason in that as I can see. And he — Mr. Reddie — he wasn’t a bad sort neither; but he’d a taking way with him, and that’s a temptation to any man; we must e’en let it be as it is.”

As he spoke he pushed wide the door, and together they passed out. Dawn lay abroad in mist over harbour and down. On a bench by the boat-house wall sat David, patiently waiting his call, a passive onlooker at the labours of other men. Strange it was to come back to life, and find another day’s work begun. Fishing-nets were going abroad, and boats putting out to sea.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### A LINK WITH THE PAST

NATURE's indifference to the affairs of man has often, both in poetry and real life, been made a subject for complaint. Yet it may be questioned whether that indifference does not act rather as a consolation than as an irritant on minds that have arrived at a sober view of man's place in the universe. It is, on the whole, a relief to the thoughtful to be free from the age of miracles, from the time, that is to say, when man was ever on the look-out for a suspension, either in his despite or in his favour, of the laws governing matter. This, at least, is certain, that more prayers are answered where man seeks for the signal of deliverance within his own heart, than where he looks for that result in outward objects alone. And if wisdom has brought him thus far in the pursuit of peace, it will be no additional grief to observe that the former and the latter rains have not changed from their beneficent disregard of individual merit or blame because his own prospects have become blighted. Modern science has discovered in open air and light an oftentimes better cure for the sores of the body than ointments and bandages; and those who can apply the same rule to the deeper ills of life will be less ready to see in the even face of nature the indifferent sleep of gods who have the power but not the will to give aid. Yet, whatever his mental attitude, the man who emerges from the depth of some inner conflict or sorrow, conscious of a

great change, cannot fail in some way or other to be struck by the new relation in which he stands to what remains familiar and unaltered. Possibly he finds there are things, once a delight, that can no longer give him any joy; and while that is so, it is here that his thoughts should least dwell. Loyal grief finds that lesson hard to learn; yet to recover the faculty of joy is the first debt we owe to what was good in the past, and to our present choice of continued existence.

With Sabrina, in the months following on that great shock of tragedy which had so altered her outlook and conditions, the process of reconciliation was slow. For while the quiet of unchanged surroundings gave rest to body and mind, her spirit was still unable to take in the truest lesson which experience teaches — that of subordinating all which has gone to the claims of present and future. She was too conscious of her great miscalculation in the past, too deeply humbled in pride, to be set now on the recovery of mental independence. Unable to forgive herself, she remained bound; and with characteristic self-depreciation allowed self-blame unreasonably to survive her memory of blame in others.

All reason for quitting the Monastery Farm had gone with the now-ended cause of dispute; nor was any word needed on David's part to assure her of a welcome so long as she wished to remain. It was upon Sabrina's own initiative that the matter was referred to, and settled by her agreeing to stay on at all events for another year; she was still too proud in her humility to take favours for granted, or regard them as permanently bestowed, when the actual need for their acceptance was over. Valentine Reddie had insured his life for a considerable sum at the time of his marriage, and Sabrina, now the sole guardian of his child, felt justified in accepting her legal due. Not that she had any intention of remaining thus dependent for

her own living; but for the present sufficient work lay to her hand in the arrangement of the material collected by her husband during his last voyage. She undertook the task gratefully as a renewal of the one rational bond of their union, and in the handling of his note-books and memoranda became once again his pupil. The actual monetary value of the collection, when set in order, was considerable, but her work upon it stood for far more: it kept her mental interests alive during a crucial period. Spring and summer had passed before her occupation came to an end.

Meanwhile, other kind influences had not been wanting. Lady Berrers, hastening her return from abroad on receipt of the news, had come to learn only gradually, and still under many reservations of tender allowance for the dead, the true inwardness of the events which had restored to Sabrina her lonely freedom. Brief and unimpassioned as was Sabrina's statement of the facts, Lady Berrers had but to look at her face to see through how great an ordeal she had passed. There was no lack of sympathy in the shrewd comment which came after patient hearing of all that could be told.

"I have let you know all I can," said Sabrina, when confidences were over. "If you condemn me, dear friend, say nothing; and I shall understand."

To that plea for mercy, Lady Berrers returned answer without words. Then she said—

"My dear, were all women like you, the world would be a better place than it is; but were only a few more like you, I might wish to be out of it for the sake of peace!"

"I suppose," said Sabrina, "women who think as I do ought not to marry."

"They ought to be very careful whom they do marry," replied her friend.

"I blame nobody but myself," answered Sabrina,

anxious to remove from one quarter the implied reproach.

"Ah! not too much of that!" said Lady Berrers, with caressing touch; "self-reproach carried to excess is but wilfulness, my dear, under another form."

Yet in that one respect she too blamed Sabrina in her secret heart, while thinking how fair a prospect, out of which no such results could have arisen, had been marred by a rash choice.

They had not talked thus openly at first or even at second meeting. But as Sabrina's heart warmed in that recovered intercourse, its need of human companionship grew more felt, and after some waiting, Lady Berrers was made the recipient of confessions she had been too wise openly to invite.

If the term "worldly" may ever be applied without reproach, it may surely be laid to the charge of that kindly heart whose springs of belief and action came from a large-minded charitable understanding of the wickedness of man. To Lady Berrers the universe meant the social scheme; she was an honoured and contented member of society, and, as far as the problem of things troubled her, she believed in society as the best possible solution. But while she lived on the conventions, regarding them as indispensable and wise, they never interfered with the dictates of her heart; no one who had won her esteem ever forfeited her regard for conduct that reversed all her notions of what was sensible or fit. Revolution she loathed; but many revolutionists had found a warm place in her affections. For women she claimed one point of wisdom above men: after a certain age, all women, she declared, thought alike; and she maintained that so universal an agreement was entitled to higher respect than the divisions of the masculine mind. Asked at what age women arrived at this wisdom, she replied, "When they become mothers." For those who had not reached that standpoint she

made infinite allowances; and while for this reason Sabrina found her an indulgent judge, there was still a hope in the lady's mind that her young friend might some day attain to the universal wisdom of her sex.

But while thus sanguine, she discerned in Sabrina's still sensitive shrinking from the contact of her kind wounds which not time alone could heal; and she foresaw danger of morbid development in so deep a discouragement of mind were it allowed to run on unchecked. The best cure, she concluded, was to make Sabrina think and be troubled about others; even some pain, that had not its centre in the past, might be good for her.

One day she said, "My dear, I want you to meet Ronald again; I have been keeping him away, and have come to the conclusion that it was a mistake."

Sabrina's face became troubled; her friend went on —

"I want you to do it for his sake; a sort of folly runs in our family — I have come upon it more than once — a wish not to be cured. Ronny is doing his best to remain broken-hearted; nothing will do him so much good as to have to meet you, and be sensible."

"But — but will he be?" asked Sabrina, to whom the prospect opened out unendurable possibilities.

"Yes," said Lady Berrers, with decision, "that is the wonderful thing; he will be — quite sensible. He is cured, and doesn't know it. I want your help, and I think I can promise that he will say nothing that can wound you."

"But *I*," objected Sabrina — "what good can *I* do him?"

"Do nothing: just let him come."

"Of course I cannot refuse to see him — ah, how could I? But, dearest madam — indeed, you ask a hard thing of me."

Lady Berrers' large heart was full of pity as



Sabrina's face of sorrowful entreaty met hers; but she spoke only with a little more than her customary decision of tone.

"Yes," she said, "I do ask a hard thing of you. Do you refuse?"

Wise in her tyranny, she did not emphasize her point when gained.

"It is nothing to trouble about yet," she said, on receiving Sabrina's faint acquiescence. "Ronny may not be down for another month."

Before that happened something else occurred which gave Sabrina fresh matter to think over. Lady Berrers, finding her one day engaged over legal-looking documents, put a question that had for some time been on her mind.

"My dear, tell me truly, how do you stand as regards money matters? Your husband had a small independence, had he not?"

Sabrina explained that this, a life interest only, had ceased at his death. She named the source of her income, adding —

"I am really not in want."

"But," said her friend, "have you good advice? Whom do you go to?"

"My husband's lawyers," answered Sabrina, "have done everything — Messrs. Pearson and Swayne."

"Messrs. Pearson and Swayne?" Lady Berrers' face showed startled interest. Then her half-lifted hands dropped to her knees; corroboration had followed swiftly on suspicion. "Well, well!" she murmured, overcome by the sudden intelligence, "is the world so small indeed? I could not have believed it possible!"

"But what — what?" asked Sabrina, with a vague fear of what news she was about to hear. "Oh, madam, tell me; is it anything dreadful?"

"No, my child," replied her friend, with an agitation that belied her words. "It is not — indeed, it is not! But if it be true, — and it must be, — then,

indeed, we have been living in strange ignorance! Tell me," she suddenly went on, "was it not through these lawyers, Messrs. Pearson and Swayne, that your husband used to receive certain remittances?"

"Yes; that is what I gather."

"Well, now, listen! Only the other day we were informed by our family lawyers that a certain payment made under my brother Ronald's will to Messrs. Pearson and Swayne in favour of an unnamed client would no longer be due."

"I do not understand."

"It had ceased to be due owing to that client's death. Now do you not see?"

"Then, then, do you mean ——?" While she spoke, comprehension dawned in her mind.

"Yes, that is what I mean," whispered her friend, "that they were one and the same — Lutworth blood. Ah! I recognize it easily now." She leaned toward her companion with tender concern. "Does this news trouble you so much?" she inquired. "Indeed, it should not! Oh, my dear! when I loved you from the first, it seems I had a true instinct that you were to belong to us." And as she drew the girl to a closer embrace, she whispered, "Do you know, I believe it has come — come at last!"

"What do you mean 'has come'?"

"Well, I remember once telling you a local saying; and you know I am superstitious — I have had reason to be. There is so much that I did not tell you — trouble that has gone on and on; yes, even to this day. And now — I begin to be no longer afraid."

Lady Berrers paused, and, looking fondly at her companion, seemed as if she would say more. But again, as on a previous occasion, she changed her mind.

"Some day I shall tell you everything," she said, smiling, "but not yet."

In what she already knew, Sabrina found enough

to employ her thoughts. With a new and strange significance recurred to her mind now the moment when her mother's dying hand had joined Valentine's with her own; all the more had it significance, seeing that not one of them had then known in what strange relationship they stood toward one broken romance of the past. Yet now that Sabrina did know, there seemed reason enough why that last effort, at a reconciliation of lives so opposed in their origin, should have ended in failure.

Lutworth and Lorry blood had at last, then, settled the score run up by previous generations; but it had been bitter payment, bringing with it no sense of reward. Valentine's old doctrine of debt came back to Sabrina with weightier meaning then; the sense that they had both been puppets in the hands of Fate threw a more pardoning light on the grievous memories of the past.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### FARMER LORRY'S LAST WORD

OLD Farmer Lorry was dying as obstinately as he had lived; never a day better, never much worse, he withdrew from the society of his kind with dogged determination. Life stayed in him like some miserly occupant of a house grown too large for his means, who, retiring to a corner of his tenement, leaves all the rest to desolation and decay.

One day, after an absence of months, Sabrina revisited him. Lorry had a way of symbolizing his infirmity of body in the rigidity of his gaze; as his limbs had lost the use of their hinges, so apparently had his eyes forgotten how to revolve. By this trick he would compel a visitor to advance across the room to a certain spot, where presumably for the first time his eye could take in the person presented. It was no use speaking to him till that ceremony had been performed. Thus he hugged to the last a remnant of his old despotic sway over the actions of men.

When Sabrina arrived at the foot of the bed, the waiting demon in his eye sat up.

"Oh! so ye're back again, are ye?" he remarked in the old formula. "Where've ye been all this while?"

"I have not been away," said Sabrina, avoiding any reference to her own concerns; "but I didn't suppose you would miss me."

"Never said I did; but ye're here now, aren't ye? What have ye been doing with yourself?"

"Part of the time I have been working."

"Oh! working, have ye been? It's plain, then, ye aren't married yet! You told me you were, last time we spoke on it."

"Because then it was true; now it is not. My husband is dead. Surely you must have heard."

Lorry swore he had not. "Dead, is he?" said he. "That's a likely story, to be sure! Well, and now ye're looking out for another, I suppose?"

"Uncle James," said Sabrina, steadying her voice to speak, "do tell me what you have in your mind against me, that you should always be saying these cruel things."

"Tell ye? What 'ud be the good of telling ye?"

"But do! I so wish we could be friends."

"There! I knew what it would come to!" cried the old man, venomously. "That's the way ye begin! It's my David ye're after, I know that well! And so ye want to get to the soft side of me!"

"You say what is not the truth!" cried Sabrina, "for you have no soft side at all, as I know to my cost. You have a very wicked and cruel tongue, uncle; shame on you, for saying such things!"

"Ah!" said old Lorry, ironically, flattered by this outbreak; "so that's what ye're come about, is it?—to give me a talking to. Well, I'm a sight older than you, Zabby, and I know women and their ways by this time. Hold your tongue, lass! you'll only be wasting breath. Now what are they doing down yonder in the four-acre? David did tell me something, but I've forgotten what it was."

Sabrina walked to the window, and then came back again; she could not meekly and submissively let her resentment go; nor was she prepared again to incur those taunts which he seemed to hold in reserve for her special benefit.

"Uncle," she said, "if you expect me ever to come here any more, or to stay now, you must

promise never to say such things again. They are untrue, and I will not have them said."

Old Lorry lay silently regarding her, his grey weather-beaten face jutting out over the bedclothes like some old gargoyle from a blank wall. So he lay, and looked, and said nothing, till with the lapse of time her words seemed to have fallen unregarded. When he had thus reduced them to their proper insignificance, he spoke.

"Well, if you don't mean to tell me what they're doing in the four-acre field, you may just as well jaunt downstairs again."

It was not a matter for dispute; either she must submit, or must go. Accepting the rebuff, she withdrew from his company without a word. His eye had not followed her when, at the door, she turned to say farewell, with such kindness as she could muster. There for a moment she still paused, hoping that even yet some word from him might give her an excuse to return. But there was no response. Fascinated by the badness of his character she stood studying him; the grim, wizened face with its cruel lines had none of the beauty or dignity of age; but there was about it a pathos which she had not realized before; there it lay in infinite loneliness, a grievous thing to be still alive; and upon it lay the weight of a hardened, querulous, and vindictive character, which had long outlived all possibility of reform. She saw suddenly the helplessness of it all; tears came into her eyes. Forgetting her pride and the injurious words which he had uttered, she went back and stood once again beside him. Meekly she gave account of the four-acre field, with its double crops, and the names of the men who had all that day been hoeing it; then, since he vouchsafed no sign, since no more was to be done, she stooped down and kissed his cheek.

Under that infliction the other said not a word nor stirred the wrinkle of a lid,

"Good-bye, uncle," she whispered, and, finding that all efforts at kindness were rendered vain, turned away with mingled relief and regret, doubting if she were ever likely to come there again.

For three hours and more Lorry bottled up his wrath, took his gruel, and bore the making of his bed, all with an outward calm; but when David came upon the scene the old farmer no longer bridled his tongue. No sooner was his son inside the door than he began.

"A man can't even have his bed to himself!" was the opening complaint which fetched forth the heart of his grievance. "No! there's sorts can't keep their hands off ye! Turn 'em out of the door, and they'll come down the chimney!" He said more till checked. "Who do I mean? Who should I mean? D'ye pretend you don't know Zabby's been here? Well, she has; she's been molesting me, — a helpless cripple in my own bed! I knew what she was after; I knew what she come about; told her plain of it, too, I did! Then she starts rating me, cusses at me, calls me names; and then — seeing that won't do — comes and cuddles me; ay, cries 'Uncle' and kisses me! What d'ye make of that for a woman, and me tied up here not able to stir a limb? A baggage!"

The old man did his stormy best, but his voice broke and grew weak.

"Ay!" he went on; "she did that because I told her to pack. 'Be off with you!' I said, 'Pack!' Well? — I can say what I like in my own bed, can't I? Ye haven't starved me out of it yet!"

He raged now, for the mere purpose of wearing himself out. The doctor had said he was never to be excited. On David's head be it, then! He was excited; he meant to be. Gathering energy, he fell to a fresh assault.

"And what do you think she come about? Eh? That's what I asked her — and told her, before she began kissing and playing it soft over me. 'It's

my David ye're after,' I told her that plain. 'You think you are going to get him, do ye?' said I."

David let go a heavy hand upon his father's shoulder.

"Here! you stop that!" said he.

But venom was on the old man's tongue; he had got past control.

"I'll not stop!" he cried. "I'll speak! I'll say as I like! Ye've been a bad son to me, David, but I'm a father to 'ee still. You're my own flesh and blood, and I'll not have 'ee fall a prey to a hungry, scheming jade like her. She's not honest, and never was; she's got too much of her father in her to be that. She's a hot un, that's what she is; one of the Devil's own!"

He was like an alarum which, wound up, must run itself down; nor had he yet said his last word, or his worst. David would listen to no more: he withdrew his hand, turned sharply about and strode out of the room. As he went down he could still hear the old man's voice raging high in a shrill torrent of abuse: then his own name loudly called, and then—silence.

Mrs. Willings, sitting below stairs, had heard the fierce hubbub going on up aloft; now, at David's bidding, she went in some trepidation to take his place. A minute later her cry came to him from the top of the stairs. Returning to the room he had so lately quitted, he saw enough to guess at what had happened. Strange lines, like cords drawn tight, now ran in parallel seams down one side of the old man's face; his mouth hung awry, only his eyes retained their life; they gazed at David with a frightened speculative stare. The spirit occupying that worn-out body had withdrawn to a yet narrower corner of its useless tenement; no thought of malice or regret could ever again be communicated from that dark and cruel habitation to the outside world. Old Farmer Lorry had spoken his last word. Deprived of the



use of that most unruly member, his tongue, he may be said then to have ceased to live; but he was not yet dead. What shade of difference remained was scarcely more than a matter of accommodation: instead of sleeping under the family pew in East Gill Church he was to occupy for another year the best bedroom at the Monastery Farm.

## CHAPTER XLIX

### LADY BERRERS TELLS A TALE

LADY BERRERS' word was true. Ronald's heart was no longer the burnt-offering it had been; yet for that very reason he needed comfort and compensation at the hand which had once dealt him his wound. Release from his allegiance was the gift he unconsciously sought after, when with a manner at once tender and shamefaced he stood again in his lady's presence. As a dog that has exchanged masters will, if they meet, lavish upon his old one a sort of contrite tenderness, acknowledging the sweetness of past relations and pleading extenuation for fresh claims that have supervened, so this most doggy of youths retracted with fond eyes the vows he had once made. Those glances of love were the quaintest that Sabrina had ever received; they were so charged with the positive assertion of which they were proud, so full of the reservation which caused them shame. Mutely they besought her to see that she was as much loved as ever, but in a different way; and after the natural restraint and awkwardness of the first encounter they worked to good purpose, bringing her mind back from its heavy dejection to an appreciation of the perennial comedy of life. She and Ronald became dear friends again, without any attempt on his part to revive the buried romance. A symbol of the changed aspect of their affection found embodiment in the small life which now lay under the shelter of Sabrina's roof. Ronald received it as though it

were the logical outcome of events, and by his demure interest in its small ways and recognition of its superiority over others of its kind, seemed to accept in their primal sense the maternal claims of its adoptive parent.

Youth is only more quaint than age in that it exposes more frankly the juxtaposition of big and little in the motives of the human heart. Ronald's soul had been through all the tragedy of unrequited passion, and had come back safe again; yet his deliverance was the one thing he could not confess openly and thankfully; and his concern was chiefly to save his face in the eyes of his once sovereign deity, by attributing his retreat to anything rather than to the recovered freedom of mind which he now enjoyed. The adopted infant afforded him his excuse, enabling him to gaze upon his transformed mistress with a resigned air and to accept as the decree of fate the sobering change in his affections. The maternal spirit, though beautiful to look upon, was not at that period of the youth's career the one which could most crown his fancy; and listening to his talk Sabrina soon perceived that under the sear leaves of past romance new buds were beginning to abound.

He talked little of himself, but much of places visited during the year spent abroad. "We," he would say avoiding names, till it became apparent that some one besides Lady Berrers had been of the party. In a little while the name of Margaret Holning began shyly to emerge. Sabrina let it come and go a few times before asking questions; it was a name to which she, also, felt some delicacy in alluding. Whatever might be the reason, Lady Berrers throughout their intercourse had seldom mentioned her daughter save to account for her continued absence on the score of health; yet from the glimpses now given she seemed a young lady abounding in energy and strong will.

"What is Miss Holning like?" inquired Sabrina,

one day, after hearing from Ronald of mannish exploits wherein that other had taken part. "She must be either very strong or very sure of herself to do things of that sort."

"Yes, she's splendid!" he answered, "the only girl I've ever come across who hasn't got nerves. Some people think she's mad: but it's sheer nerve and nothing else; she doesn't even know that it's odd. I used almost to hate her and think she was doing things that I couldn't in order to crow over me. But it's not that at all. Her idea is that if you make up your mind not to care what happens, you can do anything."

"Surely," said Sabrina, "she is young to have discovered such a philosophy."

"No; it has always been her idea; lately I have been learning it too. You see, when a woman shows you the way you must either do it, or die."

"I can fancy you thinking so," said Sabrina, smiling.

"But of course! and isn't it women like that who make men of us? I wish you could see her."

"Indeed I wish I could; she sounds wonderful."

"She wants very much to see you."

"Why is that?"

"Well, she has got the idea into her head that she hates you; and she means to see you to make quite sure. Of course when she does, it will be all right. I tell her so; but that only makes her angry."

This was curious information. Sabrina awoke to a certain sense of injury at being thus vehemently judged behind her back.

"I don't think you ought to have told me," she said; "it will be harder for me to like her now."

"Oh, but she will make no bones about it. She'll tell you herself whether she likes you or not. She's savagely truthful; that's her creed."

Truly this seemed an astonishing young person.

"When am I likely, then," asked Sabrina, "to have this pleasure?"

be given their way ; it is not fair to them that they should. And out of that situation has arisen this tug of war."

"Madam," said Sabrina, "I think—of course I do not know the circumstances—but I think you are wrong. I think that, while you oppose, you ought also to let your daughter know how much you approve."

"But I do not approve."

"You said just now that you admired her."

"As I would any one undergoing martyrdom, however wrong the cause."

"Well, madam, I believe that it is best to conceal nothing when you differ from those you love."

"I will put the case to you," said Lady Berrers, "and you shall judge for yourself. This is a piece of our family history that I have often wished to tell you, but I have for various reasons refrained. I betray no confidence,—my daughter never made any secret in the matter. One day she, a mere girl,—we were staying in Venice at the time,—came and told me she had fallen in love ; she wished me to approve her choice."

"And you could not ?"

"I could not say so."

"Was her choice, then, not good ?"

"Impossible to say. At her age then, an infinitely dangerous one, and even now, in view of her training and the position she has been brought up to fill, the danger has not lessened."

"Then she remains of the same mind ?"

"That I cannot answer ; she keeps the same vow."

"Did she pledge herself ?"

"Not to him ; but to me—that while he remains unmarried she would mate with no other man."

"And he ; was he not a good man ?"

"What he was then, I could not say certainly ; I knew of some drawbacks. I think him now one of the worthiest and best men I know. No, don't

interrupt me: wait! I am going to tell you his name. Your cousin David Lorry was the man my daughter chose."

Lady Berrers looked at Sabrina's face, and withdrew her eyes—as thoroughly informed as she had hoped to be. Then she said, less in a tone of interrogation than of triumphant argument—

"And now, my dear, tell me—in my case—what would you have done?"

Sabrina had not a word to say; and the lady did not appear dissatisfied.

"I will tell you what I did," she went on. "But I must first tell you what happened. Five years ago I and my young people were in Venice, for the usual purpose—going the usual round, enjoying ourselves—finding, as we all find out there, that our own fellow-countrymen formed the least attractive feature of its life;—I mean, of course, the tourists. On the quays we saw now and then British sailors, big helpless fellows, trying to pass the time, looking on at bustle and merriment in which they could take no part—evident islanders in a continental crowd. Naturally I felt rather sorry for them; and when the English chaplain asked us one day to pay a visit to the Sailors' Home, I was very glad to go. I was equally glad to get away, though I went there more often than once; the place was a tomb. Imagine, my dear, how we do things! Into a city that is all light and colour and warmth we import a Scotch mist; we exclude Scotch whiskey; and we label the mist, 'Sailors' Refuge.' The place was kept by a very worthy Scotch couple of the most angular type, who regarded nearly every form of enjoyment as sin, and all music and singing outside psalmody as unchristian. They provided lukewarm coffee and stale victuals at cost price, laid out on the tables old newspapers and tracts, discountenanced all forms of diversion that had not about them the prayer-meeting element, and after that let the men mercifully alone. The wonder was that

some poor home-sick fellows actually came night after night—I suppose to hear English spoken. It did not take long for us to be in the black books of the manager and his wife; they would willingly have got rid of us, but the chaplain, a good man, only not of the genial sort, intervened on our behalf. He gave me a definite reason for my visits which kept the door open to us. On the top floor of that melancholy abode lay a young English sailor, recovering from a fight, conducted in the Italian manner, with knives. That was your cousin, David Lorry. His task was to lie there, solitary most hours of the twenty-four, waiting till loss of blood and strength should be made good. Once a day the doctor visited him; twice a week the chaplain came and read the English papers to him; more regularly the manager and his wife gave him hard spiritual consolation, and warned him of hell fire. He had come to them from a street brawl—a kiss the cause—a bad subject, therefore, in their eyes. Poor lad, he was the quietest sufferer I ever met; but he almost showed that he was glad to see me, then. He asked me for news of home, of farm-hands, and all that was going on, and at last of his father; and I discovered a strange fact then—that it was not indifference, but sheer desperate reserve over feelings that were tugging at his heart, which made that name come last. Life had become impossible to him at home, yet he owed no grudge. When men are forgiving, my dear, they make me cry; while women as often as not only annoy me! I believe I cried over that poor youth when he wasn't looking at me. As soon as he was fit to be moved I claimed him, for the sake of East Gill and long-standing enmity—for I knew it would annoy the old man terribly, and I meant to let him hear of it.

“Well, I was punished, you see, for trying to patch over that blood-feud. Now my troubles were to begin! Has it ever struck you that your cousin

is anything to look at? What we are accustomed to, we often don't see. Out there, at that time, perhaps by contrast with a darker, skinnier race, he seemed an ideal of manly English youth. From the fresh airs of the lagoons, and from the many trips we took out beyond the Lido, he made a quick recovery of strength. He and Ronald became our gondoliers; thus we were entirely by ourselves. I used to love watching them, and think of them as the finest pair of youths in all Venice. The opinion was so natural, that I need not call it catching; and I was blind, because no thought of possible danger ever entered my head. I was glad for Ronald to be in brotherly comradeship with one of simpler and healthier nature than his own; also I wished to break down the barrier which generations of strife had set up between the Lutworths and the Lorrys; and so, I suppose, I was careless. I forgot to play chaperone to the young people on all their expeditions; and before I knew anything, the mischief was done.

"You know, from what I have already told you of other members of the family, that there is a dangerous strain in the Lutworth blood; and in my daughter's case the Holning blend does not seem to have weakened it. Her astonishing frankness in communicating to me the state of her heart did not make my task less formidable, or the outlook more promising. I prepared for an abrupt departure. It was not necessary; David himself came to announce suddenly his wish to return home;—and of course I let him. He and Margaret have not met since. I am an old diplomatist, and have skirmished up and down ambassadorial backstairs, in what may be called the small flirtations of politics,—things that do not get into the blue-books, my dear,—but I was beaten once in trying to extract information from a man too honest to be drawn. From David I never got any inkling of how much he knew or guessed of the truth; and yet I knew



that he knew; *how* he knew, whether by intuition or by actual word, is more than I can say; but as one who clings to the old-fashioned notions of what is seemly and right, I have my own awful suspicions; and were I to ask her as to their truth, Margaret, dear dreadful child, would confirm them without a blush, and would only see in my horror a proof of my natural taste for duplicity.

"Hitherto time has been on my side; but in a very short while from now the alliance will be shifted. On the day she is her own mistress my daughter will probably lavish on me an affection that I have missed from her for years. And when she does so, then I shall know that it is to tell me I am beaten—and forgiven. I shall admire, but I shall not the less tremble at what that same day may bring forth."

Lady Berrers could not retain her griefs without some air of comedy; but it was with real earnestness that she made a last appeal to her companion's sympathy.

"Oh, my dear, I am a desperate woman! The virtues of the young are much harder to battle with than their vices, I find. And it's no use your looking as if you were sorry for me, because you are not. You are far too virtuous yourself!"

"What have I done?" asked Sabrina, thrown off her guard by this sudden attack.

"What have you *not* done, my dear! Ask your own conscience. There is one person in this world who can cure my daughter of her malady: and that person is you!"

Having delivered that shaft, Lady Berrers changed the subject; nor was Sabrina anxious to have it continued just then.

## CHAPTER L

### LUTWORTH GIVES

LATE spring was passing into summer; the two households of the Monastery Farm still followed side by side the uneventful routine of their existence. A year had gone by, and still nothing had occurred to decide Sabrina on the move which she knew would some day become inevitable. Old Lorry still lived; how much he understood of what went on round him nobody could tell. By Mrs. Willings it was recounted to neighbours how in the long evening hours David, the man of silence, would sit beside that bed with its stony occupant, and talk. "It's like talking to a coffin," she would protest, and weep over the unreasonableness of the thing, owning that for herself she could never summon up words, or heart, or sufficient belief for the experiment. "I declare," she once remarked upon this filial devotion to duty, "if Job had had *his* patience that book would never have been written!"—a view on the causes of authorship which those who write may well lay to mind as containing some wisdom.

Sabrina, with Betty and the child, now occupied the rooms which had formerly been her mother's; life had again come to have an object for her, and so long as she could refrain from brooding over the past, she was not unhappy; but it was too often true that, as Lady Berrers put it, she hugged her skeleton.

One morning, as she went forth to her daily

errands, Sabrina halted at the gate for a last look back over the green where small Val and the dog Ron were having a tussle. Pleasant was that sight of the great beast with wide jaws worrying softly at plump body and limbs; the child rolled squealing, Ron yammered and wowffed; both were engrossed in the game. Close by, staid Betty sat and watched with half an eye on her mistress, jealously waiting for her to be gone. In that small family circle rival loves and conflicting allegiances were already at work; and Sabrina looked on, satisfied that it should be so, satisfied that Ron should lose sight of her, and Betty wish her away.

Her attention was still thus fixed when, from behind, she heard herself addressed by name. She turned; the voice was strange — not so the face. A young girl stood before her, slim and, in proportion to her development, tall. She bore herself with a boyish air, carrying her gloves at her girdle, and swung a toy cane. She was dressed as one accustomed to take exercise; everything about her was of scanty proportion except her hat; under the shade of its low brim, large grey eyes were studying Sabrina with frank scrutiny.

“I am Margaret Holning,” said the young lady; “I suppose you have heard of me before now?”

She spoke brusquely, yet with a certain blitheness as well, as one born with a good opinion of herself and of the world.

“I have often heard your cousin Ronald speak of you,” answered Sabrina.

“Ronald? Ah yes, of course, he would. You and he are great friends?”

Sabrina, knowing what she did know, chose to be a little stiff. This self-possessed young person, who took acquaintance so much for granted, had merely come, she supposed, on a visit of inspection; she was mindful therefore to make her recognition of its character evident.

“I have known him for some time; but I am

surprised to have the pleasure of meeting you. I was in no way prepared for this visit."

"You mean I ought to have waited to be introduced? But my mother has not yet recovered from the shock of my arrival. I only got here last night, and I came expressly to see you."

"Indeed? I am honoured."

"Are you? Why do you say that?"

Here already was a challenge.

"Is it not quite a natural thing to say under the circumstances?"

"No; you are much older than I am. Besides, you are a married woman, while I am not properly 'out' yet."

"I might answer that you, as Lady Berrers' daughter, are my superior in rank."

"Wouldn't that be rather an affectation? My mother, I am told, regards you as one of her most intimate friends."

"May I not say that by that also I feel greatly honoured?"

Sabrina's consistency in maintaining her point seemed to cause Miss Holning amusement. She smiled, giving a quick nod of assent; and the smile was a very winning one; but her manner was no less abrupt when she next spoke.

"I suppose you don't know why I have come to see you?" she said.

"I cannot say that I know; but perhaps I might guess."

"That would be surprising! Will you tell me?"

"You wish me to tell you what I think your true reason to be?"

"Why, certainly! It would save so much trouble. I should like to think that you knew."

"I imagine that you have come to see if I justify an opinion you have already formed about me."

"Well, yes; that is actually true," answered the other, with an open-eyed look of surprise. "How-ever did you guess that?"

"There was nothing in your manner to make me for a moment suppose you had any more friendly reason."

"Indeed, wasn't there? Now, on the contrary, I think we might become tremendously good friends if we only knew each other better."

Sabrina, having by now come to a somewhat different conclusion, remained silent.

"Well," the other went on, "as you seem to have an idea of what I have come about, may I ask you a plain question?"

"The plainer it is, the easier to answer."

Again a quick smile flashed on the girl's face, making it fair.

"It couldn't very well be plainer," she replied. "I wish to know—are you and David Lorry engaged to be married?"

Sabrina flushed painfully. "That is a strange question," she said, "to ask of one who is not even an acquaintance! But, perhaps, you have a reason which you do not wish to tell. My answer, then, is 'No.'"

The other listened meditative, unperturbed, accepting equably the knowledge so far attained.

"Very well," she said; "now I will ask you another. Are you in love with him?"

Sabrina could ill have brooked so rash an intrusion upon her personal concerns; but the story of Margaret Holning's girlish passion had come recently to her knowledge, and a certain amount of pity, mixing with her natural resentment, caused her to return a mild answer.

"If I were," she said, "do you imagine for a moment that I should feel called upon to tell you?"

"Possibly not; but I think that I should know."

"You have a strange presumption to say so!"

"Oh no! Truths are not generally so difficult to find out." Saying this she smiled, as though her task had already proved an easy one.

"Perhaps not," replied Sabrina, with warmth, "if you always show so little reluctance at meddling with affairs not your own!"

"Was it wrong to ask you a plain question?"

"Surely such questions are altogether wrong. What right have you to pry into the secrets of others?"

"Oh, none — if they are secrets."

"Whether they are or are not, a stranger has no right even to make the inquiry."

"A stranger? You mean me? So I am to you; but I know David Lorry well. Of course," — she cast a sly glance of mischief at her companion, — "of course I might ask him the same question; but, perhaps, he wouldn't know! Anyway, it seemed more natural to ask you."

"What seems natural to you I might call by a harder name. As far as I am concerned your question must remain unanswered."

"Indeed not; you have already answered it, else you would not be so offended. I wish you wouldn't think I have been worrying you out of idle curiosity; it really matters a good deal." The girl hesitated; then, on a sudden impulse, went on, "Do, do try not to dislike me so much! Let me speak quite openly for a few minutes; the shortest way is so much the best. If we only knew each other better — I do like you; at least, I could! — it would be all easy. Don't go *making* it difficult."

"Of course you can say what you like," answered Sabrina; "but if you propose asking me questions, you must not necessarily expect answers. Not that that need trouble you, for you seem to have no difficulty in shaping them to your own liking."

"That is one way of putting it. I suppose that I hurt your feelings. Well, I'm not here for my own pleasure, so I must put up with any knocks you like to give me. Now I have your leave to speak — shall we walk? I can't bear to stand still."

They moved on, instinctively choosing the path

that led soonest to solitude. Sabrina, as they advanced side by side, maintained a rigid front for an ordeal that made hard trial of her patience. Not so her companion. Having directed a fresh searching glance at a face now for the first time seen in profile, she said —

“Do you know, you are actually as beautiful as I expected you to be? Ronald, though he tried, wasn't able to tell me more than the truth. Over his ideals he's not generally so dependable.”

“I wish,” said Sabrina, now in a mood that made compliments doubly distasteful, “I wish that you would leave me altogether out of the question. Please come at once to what you have to say!”

“Very well; I will be as short as I can. But, since you object to questions, I shall have to explain. Five years ago I met your cousin David; I was very young, and I lost my heart to him. You can hardly think that strange.”

She spoke quickly; there was no sound of emotion in her voice, but her colour burned high.

“May I go on?” she said.

“Certainly. No doubt you have some reason for telling me this.”

“Yes. I was then, as I say, very young, and was supposed not to know my own mind. Perhaps, having lived with it longer, I know it better now; but still my opinion of him has not altered. I am less — romantic, I suppose, is the ordinary word for it — inexperienced is the true one. I don't imagine I should die, or even make myself eternally miserable, were he now to marry you instead of me.”

“I have asked you to leave me entirely out of the question,” interposed Sabrina. “I allow no such supposition.”

“Very well; let it stand — if he does not marry me. I have no claim, and I make none; only I can't bear to think of his marrying some one not worthy of him, merely because he must find a wife somewhere. He might have to do that; it is difficult

for a man situated as he is to remain single. And so, you see, I have to look after him—and to see you.”

Such amazing frankness in one so young seemed to Sabrina less like an undue degree of honesty than a sort of mania. She was beginning to wonder if she had not to deal with a person of unbalanced mind; and yet there was no doubt that in what she heard there was unexceptionable good sense.

With perfect self-command now, without pause yet without heat or hurry, in a voice that had its moments of musical charm, Margaret Holning continued to speak her mind.

“All that was five years ago,” she said, “—when it began, I mean; and I have not seen him since. Tell me!—if I were to meet him now, do you think I should see in him any change likely to cure me of what I once felt? I mean, should I see the same man now as then?”

“How can I tell,” replied Sabrina, seeking to avoid so direct a challenge to an opinion, “since I do not know what you saw in him to admire five years ago? I did not myself know him then.”

“But you know him now; that is why I am asking you?”

Something in the girl’s voice touched a soft chord of Sabrina’s heart; but her reason and her taste still wholly disapproved of such questions. She hesitated; then said—

“I think the fears you entertain for him are quite groundless; he is not one who would ever act unworthily. Were he to marry, it would not be for such poor reasons as you seem to think likely. I could promise beforehand to honour any woman whom his choice approved.”

“Even were he to marry me?”

“I should respect his judgment before my own.”

She spoke coldly; yet the other smiled as though somehow the answer had satisfied her. For a moment her eyes met Sabrina’s penetratingly, but not



as though they sought there for anything they did not know. The scrutiny stopped, her lids fell; as though speaking only to herself, she said in a low voice —

“It is not in the least likely that he will — now.”

Sabrina made no response; for a while they walked on together in silence. When Margaret Holning next spoke, a gentle reflectiveness marked her words.

“At that time,” she said, “I would have given anything to marry him—given up everything, I mean, from the worldly point of view. That meant nothing to me then. Now—yes, now too I would give up much if you could make me think that no better woman was willing to marry him. As long as I stayed away I could not be sure. That is why I came to see you.”

“Indeed,” said Sabrina, “on that point I can give you no assurance at all. I am sorry you should have thought such a thing possible.”

“I did, and I don’t think I was mistaken. You are surprised, I suppose, that even now it doesn’t seem to me a mistake, my coming here. You have told me all I expected to know—much more than I had any right to ask. I am very sorry to have been such a nuisance. If you wish to be rid of me now, you have only to say the word, and we will part.”

“That is hardly necessary,” said Sabrina, “since we have both to go back the same way; this path I have brought you to leads nowhere; living under the downs, I find that climbing becomes an instinct. If you have nothing further to say, let us return.”

They reversed their steps; at their feet lay the broad woods and pastures of East Gill; in the foreground rose the grey tiled roof of the Monastery Farm, set in its squares of garden, orchard-paddock, and lawn, a memorable view to eyes that have once seen it. Margaret Holning gave it a welcome in look and words.

"I am very glad to have come here again," she said. "I used to romp up these downs when I was a child; and all is just as beautiful as ever. The best things in the world, left to themselves, when we come back to them, show us our own unimportance. I feel small."

As she spoke, her eye, ranging over the lower levels, fell upon a man's figure crossing diagonally the field at the back of the farm. Her feet slackened till, almost unconscious of herself, she stood still. Sabrina at her side could not but be aware that their eyes were drawn to the same object, perhaps with no great difference in the character of their thoughts. She stole a side-glance at her companion's face, and saw that it had again become flushed; the grey eyes, gazing afar with fixed intent, had a half-eager look, a breathing smile played over the lips.

All at once the younger woman turned her head and caught the examining glance.

"Yes," she said, without attempting to disguise the subject of her thoughts, "that is just how he used to walk—always a sort of easy uphill stride, as if the ground he went over made no difference. There, now he's calling the dogs! Yes, I should know his voice again, too. I suppose he calls you 'Sabrina'; I was always 'Miss Holning.' And this is the first time I have seen him for years; are you still jealous of me?"

"I cannot be 'still' what I have never been."

"You want me to believe that?"

"As to your belief, I am indifferent. It was not said to deceive you."

Margaret Holning's eye rested once more in contemplation on the farm.

"You even live under that roof," she said.

"Yes, I have done so for some time; but it is only a temporary arrangement."

"Becoming less and less temporary as time goes on. What do people think about it?"

"Why should they think anything?"

"I thought—it is not a thing I understand myself—but I thought such an arrangement would hardly be considered 'proper.' Perhaps people here are more sensible than elsewhere."

"My mother lived here," Sabrina frigidly explained; "and so the arrangement has continued. As you take so special an interest in the matter, you may be relieved to hear that I shall very soon have left; only the date has not been fixed."

"Dates are always better fixed," replied the other, "then there is no misunderstanding. Also they help us to know if we have really made up our minds. You do really mean to go away, then?—that is your downright intention,—not merely a vague notion of what you ought to do but don't?"

The open speculation of the girl's look as she put the inquiry implied at once incredulity and hope; there was a touch of mockery in her tone. It stung Sabrina to a more sharp retort than she had yet made.

"I am not in the habit of saying what is not true," she answered. "Certainly I do mean to go. You, Miss Holning, have helped me to see that it has been unwise for me to stay so long; it seems that to some minds the simplest matters are open to misconstruction."

But again the quick answer seemed to make no impression.

"Yes," answered the girl with unruffled composure, "I think you are quite right. Well, here I can leave you; perhaps I shall not see you again. This was only a flying visit—a novelty with a purpose; when I have had my talk with David Lorry, my whole reason for coming will be over. Of course I shall be down again for my cousin Ronald's coming of age. Till then—for you won't quite have gone by then, I suppose?—good-bye!"

They parted as they had met, with no more

than a formal exchange of words; but having gone a few steps, Margaret Holning again faced about, saying —

“I can't help feeling that you dislike me; I dare say it is my fault; but I like making prophecies, and I believe that some day we shall be better friends.”

“As to that I cannot tell,” answered Sabrina; “but at least I must thank you for what seems like a wish. I hope, if we ever meet again, it will not be to renew this discussion.”

“When we meet again it will be quite unnecessary,” replied the young lady. “You will have fixed your dates.”

That cryptic remark was the last word; it was followed by a quizzical nod of asseveration; Miss Holning had apparently a mind thoroughly made up on certain points. Sabrina watched her departing, quick of step, holding her head high, as though well assured of herself and of the future — possessed of the effrontery of youth which believes in the friendship of fate. It was an attitude which the elder woman found hard to forgive; there was in it too much arrogance to please her. Moreover, she had her personal grievance; the encounter, if it had not discomfited, had been uncomfortable to her; her sensitiveness had been badly bruised; and away went the aggressor with head up, bearing no wound at all. As she watched the receding figure, Sabrina felt little drawn in love toward her, and not the smallest inclination for a renewal of the acquaintance. And yet she admired the girl, in that she managed to be so complete a contradiction of the type she seemed to stand for; there was nothing brazen or immodest about her, for the simple reason that she was entirely unconscious of her daring, — it was conviction, not pose, giving bravely to view an open and undefiant nature. That was the strangest thing about it — defiance had been wholly absent; there was even something eminently

conciliatory in this young woman, so Amazonian in her bearing.

Yet, in the summing up, dislike outweighed sympathy, till, for the sake of charity, Sabrina set herself to trace out some likeness between the mother and the daughter. Much to her surprise, before long it stood out unmistakably. The discovery helped her to understand more clearly, and with a certain humorous appreciation, how it was that Lady Berrers found that character a difficult one to handle.

There were traces of that same difficulty when she and her friend met two days later.

"My dear," said the lady, anxiously cordial in her greeting, "I have been wanting yet dreading to come and see you! You have had an encounter, it seems; do you survive? How much apology do I owe you?"

"You mean as to my meeting with your daughter?" said Sabrina, smiling to give her friend ease.

"Yes; five days ago she attained her majority. I was up in Town with her, ready to dance her about; but no, she was for passing it over, and refused all congratulations: I was practically dismissed. Then, two days later, she exhibits herself in full-fledged state—descends upon me here. I've been hugged, petted, and set at naught; I feel a very ruffled old hen! Tell me—is my bonnet straight?"

Sabrina laughed at the ludicrous colours of the sketch, and the forlorn air of the would-be victim.

"Don't!" cried the lady; "I want to be reassured. Give me your honest opinion of her. I will bear it, whatever it may be."

"My honest opinion is at present a prejudiced one; while detecting a likeness, let me own that I prefer the original."

"You say it kindly, but you make me feel compromised. Yet you might have said worse! She,

I believe, likes you; she calls you 'the proud mother Abbess,' and approves of your style of dress; she went back to Town yesterday, taking Ronald with her, 'to do shoppings,' she said. They are coming back together for the feasting."

Lady Berrers talked on with all the lightness at her command, but her friend knew that she was but skirmishing toward her object. All at once she became grave.

"Do you know," she asked anxiously, "whether she saw *him*?"

"I only know that she meant to."

"She has not told me, and I dared not ask. This morning she writes me a letter purposely intended to entrap me in mystery; tells me to take a deep breath and thank God I have a daughter who is not as other daughters are, but one that knows her own mind;—goes on to say that she has always wondered what it would be like to propose to a man and be rejected, and means to go on wondering to her dying day in order to have something still to live for. 'If you want any explanation,' she says, 'ask the mother Abbess.' Also, at the very end of her letter, she writes, 'Ask the proud young mother Abbess why, having lived in the Monastery for so long, she should now think of quitting it.' My dear, is there any truth in that?"

"Yes; I cannot expect always to make this my home."

Lady Berrers presented a rueful countenance to her friend, eloquent of defeated hope.

"But surely, surely, you are not going to leave us *now*?"

"I have come to see that I must. Here, as you once said, I am living among ghosts and skeletons. Is it not better to try once for all to get rid of them, to start fresh?"

Yet, as Sabrina spoke, her dejection at the prospect was manifest.

"But," said her friend, "if you go in that mood,

they will only follow you. When we don't make use of our skeletons, they haunt us. Why are you so much in terror of them? They are part of poor humanity's stock in trade, the scaffolding on which we rise to our best selves. Don't regret having to regret things, or you will never become wise. Look at the face of any one worth knowing; your cousin David's face — there you see a man. And what is it but the shadow of his past making there a light and shade that nothing will change?"

Thinking of that face, and recognizing a truth in her friend's description, Sabrina mused, then said—

"You speak of him; there is something I wish to know — now that I am going away I feel that I may ask it. What have people in the past ever had to say against him?"

Lady Berrers stated the fact. "He used to drink; it was after his mother died and before he ran away from home. Alone with his father he led a dog's life; he used to disappear and come home again a wreck; and at last he disappeared altogether. I imagine that in the years following he led a wild life, but when I found him abroad he was much as he is now. Ah, I can see you think no worse of him for it, and you are right; he conquered himself. But a lonely man, Sabrina, without object or end, denied wife and children to make home sweet to him, may revert to old habits; they lie under the blood; they are not as if they had never been."

By a true instinct Sabrina's mind went back to the night when she had found David sitting in the painted parlour alone, with an open book before him and the wounded deerhound at his feet. She did not forget what a day that had been for him of disaster and sad tidings; there was knowledge by which she could speak.

"No," she said, "I know him better than that! He needs no woman to make him a good man." And as she boasted for him his proud independence of her sex, suddenly her tears fell apace.

Lady Berrers looked at her softly. "And yet," she said, "living as he lives now, he will be a lonely man."

Sabrina fought her friend's meaning, but would not meet her look.

"Have not the strong a right to be lonely?" she asked. "It does them no harm."

Wise in the ways of the heart, Lady Berrers said again —

"A lonely man, Sabra!"

And at the repeated word Sabrina let her head fall forward upon her friend's knee.

"I know, I know!" she wept; and Lady Berrers said no more.



## CHAPTER LI

### THE MIST CLEARS

AN oppressive closeness had hung over East Gill for two or three days, though the weather was not particularly warm. On the third morning the sense of lassitude became almost unbearable. Betty, declaring that thunder must be in the air, retired to her room and came down again with a body that had neither shape nor symmetry. "Steels attract the lightning," was her scientific apology for the transformation; and feeling herself thus safe-guarded from thunderbolts, she went about her work with a composed air.

Her diagnosis of the weather proved wrong. About eleven o'clock sea mist rolled in, obliterating all landmarks and spreading itself at large over the lower slopes of the downs and along the meads. Pushed by invisible forces from the rear it crawled slowly inland, with the air of a blind man feeling his way; the soil grew dank under its advance, tufts and shreds of it caught on the branches of trees and clung there, while the vast grey mass forming its main body drove steadily forward, revealing currents of air too light to be felt as wind.

Those who had to breathe and grope their way in this atmosphere experienced a disagreeable sense of confinement, not the less real because no actual barrier stood between them and freedom. Somewhere this dominion of obscurity had its limits; and to brains closed in by a blank wall of slowly

moving vapours, the knowledge that a little higher up, or a little further inland, lay clear air where breath could be wholesomely taken made the surrounding oppression more trying. Across open ground these vapours, which rendered definite objects featureless and gave to viewless air a suggestion of form, drifted with a settled tendency; along roads or footpaths where the hedges ran counter to the wind, they revolved in slow spirals; against solid obstructions they remained stagnant. Thus by concentrated attention on the grey particles that floated around, the eye might make a guess at its surroundings without seeing them, obtaining at the same time a sense of direction unaided by landmarks.

Sabrina, having endured for an hour the heavy atmospherical depression, set out with the determination of reaching some point where pure air would be obtainable. Her choice lying between near altitude and far distance, she concluded to strike for the highest point of the downs, where, if at all, a relief from prevailing conditions might be looked for. She had scarcely quitted the tree-girdled hollow in which the farmstead lay, when she found herself involved in perfectly opaque mist. Over the whole stretch of field that led down to Amesbay the air had the appearance of a white wall which divided as she stepped into it, and closed again behind her, so that it almost seemed as if her body, undergoing some ghostly attenuation of substance, had itself become a part of the atmosphere, and was but a shifting atom with more compactness and determination in it than the rest. Passing from the lane through a gate into the first field, she managed to strike upon the margin of the small stream which here ran down into the bay. This brought her to the brick-walled place of the sheep-washing, beyond which a narrow foot-bridge led to the track over the down. As she mounted, skirting the edge of the fir plantation which was

her first landmark, she found the air less dense. Between the vast rise of the down on the one hand, and the shelter of the fir wood on the other, the fog had not yet settled to a uniform consistency. Here and there, in the prickly hedge and on protruding fir boughs, tags of mist hung suspended, with their edges slowly fraying under the attrition of a semi-stagnant air; while against every hillock of rising ground lay similar patches of vapour, spread upon the turf with a carpet-like flatness, or like huge mushrooms invisibly rooted to earth. Over all a slow infiltration of fresh molecules of mist was constantly taking place.

Still ascending, Sabrina came without much difficulty on the first of the posts which served as guides to the summit. A few yards higher thick fog cut the air again like a dividing wall. She advanced till it enveloped her from head to foot, and immediately became lost. Her only way now was to ascend. For a while there was no danger of her going wrong, but when the broad and slightly undulating head of the down was reached, she had no longer anything to go by except the slow drift of the vapours around her. Guiding herself thus she had not gone far when a sudden stumble caused her to realize the perilousness of her position; before she was aware of its existence she had overstept a short declivity and had fallen, bruising her knees and hands. It was an easy matter to climb back again, but not so easy to determine in which direction lay safety. The fog from which she had expected to escape was here denser than anywhere. Discovering that she had been foolish, she now tried to be wise. She concluded that her best course would be to sit down and wait, but the resolve was less easy to keep than seemed reasonable. Inaction makes a person feel not only helpless but foolish; several times she rose, determined to feel her way cautiously to higher ground; but each time fear of

going wrong got the better of her, and she sat down again.

More than an hour passed; there was nothing in the thick white glare of the mist that held out promise of change or amendment, nothing to engage the eye, or to give cheer to the mind. Yet the very blankness of the outlook fascinated her; she stared till her eyeballs ached for the sign which never came. Something like another hour went by, and there was still no prospect of relief; her clothes were saturated with moisture, she was getting chilled. From where she sat the sea was distinctly audible, and its direction seemed clear.

"Surely," she thought at last, made desperate by a monotony of waiting which was beginning to seem endless, "surely I can feel my way step by step, since I know what quarter to avoid." She stood up; a cold air touched her cheek; the fog had apparently acquired a definite motion. Not knowing that the wind had gone round, she became confused; as the mist was now blowing towards the sea, she began to think that her sense of hearing was at fault. She remained standing, but could not make up her mind in which direction to move.

Far away, very faintly, she thought she heard a voice calling. On the chance she answered. Again she heard it; this time there could be no doubt. "Sabra!" came the call.

"Here, here; I am here!" she cried.

A grey shape appeared, shadowy and swift, flinging towards her; it was Ron; he crouched and fawned, dragging at her gown with teeth and paws. Behind came a sound of running feet; a dark form loomed by and disappeared, going aslant into the mist.

"Here!" she cried again.

The dark object reappeared, heading straight to where she stood; indistinct at first, it cleared as it drew close. Warm as a beacon, and as sweet to look upon, she beheld David's face.

He stood rayed in mist. A grave darting light shone in his eyes—the bird of prey look which she knew of old and had learned not to fear.

“Oh, David, I am ashamed of myself! How troublesome I have been!” she said, smiling rather sadly at her sorry plight.

“Well, yes, you have!” he answered, in a tone of grim satisfaction. “Whatever took you up here?”

“I thought I would be clever: I wanted to be out of the fog.”

“You came a bit too soon.”

“And so you have had to come and look after me?”

“I couldn’t well do else, when I heard where you were gone.”

He spoke sternly but his eyes were very friendly; merriment lurked in his mouth.

“I suppose it’s no use now saying how sorry I am?” she observed in contrite tone.

“Not the least,” he replied cheerily. “D’you want to get back at once, or shall we wait a bit? The wind’s gone round with the tide; in a few minutes it’ll begin to clear.”

“Can you spare the time?” inquired Sabrina.

David looked at his watch, and considered.

“Well, yes, I can just manage it,” he said. “The fact is, there’s something I wanted to ask you, and now, I suppose, is as good a time as any.”

Sabrina waited to hear more; but David’s next words were not much to the point.

“Shall we stay here or walk on?” said he. “Like enough on ahead we shall find it clearer.”

“Let us go forward then.”

They moved on for a little while in silence. A distinct current of wind was now beginning to drive the fog back sea-wards. No longer uniformly opaque, it broke billowing cloud behind cloud, all held within a web of thinly spun vapour. Separate blades of grass tawny of hue were becoming visible

under their feet, the rising ground ahead began to show clearance.

"I hear you are meaning to leave," said David at last.

"I—yes; at least—that is to say, I thought of doing so."

"You'd not made up your mind, then?"

"Oh yes, I had made up my mind, quite; but—I mean that, as I had not said anything to you, I did not regard it as altogether settled; for I ought not to make any plans without first telling you."

"Oh, not at all," said David.

"Yes, indeed, I think so. And, since you have mentioned it—who was it that told you?"

"Some one who said she had it from you."

Sabrina flushed; anything coming from that source she was inclined to resent.

"Ah, was it she? I wonder why she interferes. Surely it is no business of hers?"

"Well, anyway you seem to have told her. What I want to know is why you should be so set on going."

"Because it is best—for so many reasons, and some day I should have to."

"Why some day?"

"It would not be right for me to stay always. I am treating as my own what, at some later day, you may want for yourself. One has to look ahead."

"Not so far as all that, surely?"

David spoke in good earnest; she let her gratitude be seen.

"I know how kindly you mean it," she said; "but, indeed, how can you tell? I am already too much in your debt. As it is, my great difficulty will be ever to thank you enough."

"You'd do that easiest by staying. Don't you think you might manage it?"

"No, no," she answered, "the pleasantest choice

is seldom the right one, I find. To postpone the evil day would only make it harder when it came."

As she spoke she was realizing, more than ever before, what separation from this place which had become her home would mean. Tears started to her eyes; in her voice also there was that which could not pass unnoticed. Keenly through the grey mist David's eyes sought to read the meaning in her face. He halted abruptly; she, too, had no choice then but to stay.

"Ah, David, don't look at me!" she cried miserably, unable to bear the honest scrutiny of his glance. "Yes! I have learned to dread change so much—I, who used to look forward to it—that the mere thought makes me behave foolishly. Don't take any notice; please don't!"

But David Lorry, having come to a standstill, now evidently meant to speak forth his mind.

"Sabra," he said, "I suppose you wouldn't agree to any shorter way of settling the matter?"

"What shorter way can there be?"

"Well—like marrying me, I mean. Is that a thing you could ever bring your mind to at all?"

If he had entertained anything but the forlornest hope, Sabrina's answer did not seem encouraging.

"Oh no, I couldn't, indeed!" she murmured in a voice of deep distress. "Don't ever think of it, David; you ought not to let yourself wish such a thing possible!"

"But why not? Can you give me any reason why not?—any sensible reason, I mean."

"There are so many!" she declared, with her mind all a blank as to what they might be.

"Tell me just one of them."

She tried to think, and spoke unguardedly. "It would be too—too good for me!" she faltered at last. "I ought never to think of it!"

But, as she spoke, the mere renunciation of that high prospect tore down the mask of her pride. When a lover hears his mistress declare with tears

that she is not worthy of him, he may know his hour is at hand—for what is fortunate love but a mutual surrender to happiness we do not deserve?

“Well,” said David, considering the objection with impartial benevolence, “anyhow that would be a mistake on the right side, wouldn’t it?”

He drew nearer to her as he spoke, and she had no reason to shrink away; for this lover by his voice and manner betrayed little of the joy that now made music in his blood.

She glanced up into his face, and saw those keen eyes like the lights of home, watchful and encouraging, a positive summing-up of all she was trying to deny.

“No, no,” she cried in answer to that waiting look; “for the gain would be mine, not yours at all; and to be right it should be all just the other way!”

Laughter came rarely to David’s lips, but he laughed now. Contentment seemed to brim in that sound.

“Should it?” he said; “should it? Well, I reckon it seems gain enough to me; and I haven’t come to you for less than I want.”

Under the peaceful rebuke of his regard, Sabrina had already yielded up her will; but a woman’s tongue will still have its word to say, though the cause be lost.

“Oh, David,” she cried, in a vain defence that had in it more of surrender, “but suppose what you think of me should be all a mistake?—What then?”

“Well,” he said, “if so, ’tis an old one, and past remedy. You’ll never be able to mend it, my dear.”

The simplest things are the most revealing. At that, the first term of endearment she had ever received from her lover’s lips, a clear light of understanding and gratitude filled Sabrina’s heart. For in that moment of her surrender he seemed



unconscious of any triumph; his words went rather to establish the loving-kindness of the past, and the close familiarity which had known the service of years. "You'll never be able to mend it, my dear!" That was his claim,—the plain statement of irrevocable affection; and as she heard it her heart grew empty of all further desire to oppose what time had so proved.

In a sort of helpless joy she reached out her hands to him, let them be clasped, stood a willing prisoner, and felt like swift ichor flowing through her veins the assurance of the freedom that was still hers. Her lover's hands were upon her, and yet she was at liberty; revered in the fire of his passion she stood unscathed, free from the overmastering of the male embrace. Yet even as she exulted in the worth of her choice, she was to learn also what his own need of her had been. All at once, as though some restraining force had been let go, David dropped his head beside hers, rested his brow upon her shoulder, and stood like a man very weary after long journeyings. She heard the deep indrawing of his breath, and saw his body heave, as full and final relief from bitter restraint found its way into his being. And what he would not take she was fain now to give; before such humility all the reserves of bashfulness and pride were broken down. Tears, from a diviner source than grief, sprang in her eyes; she turned her head, and in a glad impulse of compassionate love pressed her lips to his face.

"I don't want it mended," she said; "let all be as it is!"

No other word passed between them just then. Speech was superfluous, and David the lover was still the man of silence he had ever been. Ron looked up with soft hungry eyes, and waved his tail, waiting patiently for some crumb of love to fall to him. A word sufficed; happy in his own pursuits he gambolled ahead.

A few minutes later, leaving the spot where the whole current of their lives had become changed, the two resumed their way, advancing towards the highest point of the down. Grey mist was still about them, but its quality was now rapidly changing; the air was no longer oppressive to breathe; in the disparting of its vaporous shroud hung a darkness as of early dawn. Clearness lay visible ahead, shaping from thick pallor into light; they stepped into it and found themselves once more in space.

“Hark!” cried Sabrina.

High overhead in the grey lightening round of heaven a lark trebled its song; clear drenched grass lay at their feet; and away on all sides, as though sucked off by the moist earth, shrank the descending mist.

The spectacle now presented to their gaze was beautiful beyond words. This swift dispersal from each other of two elements, operated by invisible powers, resembled nothing so much as some huge scene-shifting with the earth for its stage. Wherever the eye could pierce, high above all landmarks, compact masses of rolling vapour drove off through space. Embodied in mist, the motion of the wind became less of a dynamic force than a panoramic display; the tenuous air, changed into a continent, seemed to be drifting bodily out to sea. And as it drifted it sank. Away to eastward appeared a dark ridged outline, its top clearly defined, vapour at its base. This was the Roman encampment on the head of the neighbouring down; slowly it grew, striking root downwards through the ever-descending mist. In a little while other headlands appeared; Cover Cliff, with its coastguard huts sharply limned in black and white, and beyond all Herm's Head, bull-fronted, ruddy, and scarred. To the west, the top of Tort Rock stood like an island far out on a milky sea; halfway between that and West Gill, Hawk's Point, bearing now a clear likeness to its

name, put up a beaked and hooded crest. And as the eye ranged inland over that floor of mist, one by one in due order bare hill and wooded mount rose and took island form, as though some fairy archipelago had been called into being by the stroke of a magician's wand.

Above the drifting whiteness the sky began to show its blue; from the south-west pale shafts of sunshine fell upon the young woods in amber-dropping light, and the sparkle of disappearing mist and rising song seemed to make one combined appeal to man's sense of joy.

Sabrina stood in silent company, watching with wonder and delight this apparition of a refreshed and familiar world. Surely she had reached her Pisgah now; a land flowing with milk and honey lay spread before her view. She turned her eyes left and right, and everywhere saw fresh landmarks rising to beckon of their return. To the left a few red roofs on the further slope above West Gill began to appear, then the small pinnacle of the church standing alone, then the old turnpike at the high junction of the main road and the steep lane leading down into East Gill.

And now the smoke was blowing off the Castle woods; turret and flagstaff appeared where so soon would be floating the emblem of Ronald's attained majority. Presently the thatched roofs of the village emerged, and all behind was land again; but over the meads towards Amesbay the mist still rolled thick and white. Down below, the top of the Abbot's Door showed no more than as a dark blur of shade, and further out, filmy as a silk-moth seen through the folds of its cocoon, hung the lug-sail of a fishing-smack.

But upon land the visionary impression was already passing away; real and prosaic things were taking its place. Over the slope of the hill below the camp a troop of cattle could be seen running down to the bay. They disappeared into the mist.

Presently the trampling of their feet came up from the shingle below; they had gone down to drink at the stream where it spread shallow to the shore.

And now halfway between East Gill and Amesbay one fresh landmark was to be discerned; a grey-tiled roof and a weather-vane appeared, broad windows, and the end-gable of a barn.

For that Sabrina had been watching. Her eyes lightened happily; she laid her hand gently upon her companion's arm.

"There is home!" she said.

"Ay," answered David, "I reckon it'll be home now."

THE END



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